



The Horn of Africa and Italy

Colonial, Postcolonial and
Transnational Cultural Encounters

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The Horn of Africa and Italy

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Transnational Cultural Encounters

EDITED BY SIMONE BRIONI
AND SHIMELIS BONSA GULEMA



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Contents

List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
A Note on the Text	xi
SIMONE BRIONI AND SHIMELIS BONSA GULEMA	
Introduction: A Transnational Cultural Encounter	i
PART I Colonialism	45
OLINDO DE NAPOLI	
1 Law: The Myth of Progress and Differentialism in the Liberal Age	47
WU MING 2	
2 Landscape: Somalia as Seen in Italian Colonial Literature	73
LEE CASSANELLI	
3 History: Italian Fascist Visions of Somalia's Past and Future	93
PART II Postcolonialism	107
SHIMELIS BONSA GULEMA	
4 Urbanism: History, Legacy, and Memory of the Italian Occupation in Addis Ababa (1936–1941)	109

SARA MARZAGORA

- 5 Nationalism: The Italian Occupation in Amharic Literature and Political Thought 141

ANTONIO MARIA MORONE

- 6 Racism: *Meticci* on the Eve of Colonial Downfall 167

DANIELE COMBERIATI

- 7 Decolonization: Representing the Trusteeship Administration of Somalia 193

PART III Transnationalism 215

LORENZO MARI

- 8 Heroes: A Transnational Reconsideration of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan and Omar al-Mukhtar in Literature and Film 217

MILENA BELLONI

- 9 Diaspora: A 'Postcolonial' Migration? An Analysis of Eritrean Mobility Trajectories 241

SIMONE BRIONI

- 10 Sport: Leisure, Representation, and Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion 265

EMMA BOND

- 11 Photography: Memorial Intertexts in New Writing by Maaza Mengiste, Nadifa Mohamed, and Igiaba Scego 295

Notes on Contributors 319

Index 323

Figures

- Figure 1.1: Jean Léon Gerome's *La Vérité sortant du puits armée de son martinet pour châtier l'humanité* (1896). 49
- Figure 10.1: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia's mother watches her daughter on TV. 281
- Figure 10.2: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. The story of the fisherman. 282
- Figure 10.3: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia takes a crying baby into her arms on the boat to Italy. 283
- Figure 10.4: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia writes a Facebook post. 284
- Figure 10.5: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia explains some of the reasons why she wants to leave Somalia. 286
- Figure 11.1: Somali Village, Edinburgh Marine Gardens, Portobello, 1910 – Group of Warriors. Public domain postcard. 297

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Simone Brioni
New York, 17 September 2017

ይህንን መጽሐፍ ሳዘጋጅ ለረዱኝ በሙሉ ምስጋናዬን አቀርባለሁ። በተጨማሪም የአፍሪካና ጥናት የትምህርት ክፍል፣ የሂወትማኒቲስ ማእከል፣ የስቶኒ ብሩክ ዩኒቨርሲቲ፣ ተማሪዎቼን እና ቤተሰቦቼን እያመሰገንኩኝ በኔ በኩል መጽሐፉን ለላሃገራችንና ምድራችን መልካም ለሚያስቡ፣ በዋጋ ለለማይተመኑት ነጻነት፣ ፍትህና አኩልነት ለሚታገሉ ሁሉ መታሰቢያነት አወላለወ።

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A Note on the Text

Translations in the text are the authors', unless otherwise stated. Arabic and Somali proper names are mentioned by referring to the original, which is the most common practice in African studies whose work focuses on the Horn of Africa. This choice has been made to avoid the ambiguity caused by the Westernization of these names.

Introduction: A Transnational Cultural Encounter

Our politics must be Italian and our market must be the world [...] our fathers cleared the path for new civilization [and] we would betray our fatherland if we did not expand our field of economic activity.¹

The encounter between Italy and the area in the Horn of Africa (also referred to as North East Africa) which now includes Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia began at the end of the nineteenth century with the rise of the colonial enterprise. This relation was forged to a large extent through war and violence. However, to put the matter in these terms would miss the complexity of an encounter that also included religious exchange, commercial transactions, and explorations that produced knowledge about the geography, history, politics, society, and cultures of people in North East Africa. In more than one instance, these facets were used in the service of Italian and European colonialism, but the relation between the two regions was extensive, and was not limited to, colonial expansion and conquest.

Notwithstanding, colonialism is a crucially important fact that shaped the encounter between Italy and the Horn of Africa.² In the

1 Francesco Crispi, 'Discorso del Presidente del Consiglio a Palermo, 14 ottobre 1889', in Tommaso Palamenghi Crispi, ed., *Scritti e discorsi parlamentari di Francesco Crispi* (Rome: L'Universelle, 1913), 730.

2 There is an extensive study of Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa by scholars from the region itself and beyond. For a general history of Italian colonialism, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale: Dall'Unità alla Marcia su Roma* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1976); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale: La conquista dell'Impero* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1979); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale: La caduta dell'Impero* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1982); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale: Nostalgia delle colonie* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1984); Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il

process of the 'scramble for Africa' (1884–1914), the Horn of Africa was divided between Britain, Italy, and France leading eventually to the rise of four colonial territories: Italian Eritrea and British, French and Italian Somalilands. Ethiopia briefly joined the list in 1936. Italy, a unified nation only since 1861, ended up conquering a territory much larger – approximately 660,000 square miles compared to Italy proper's 119,765 square miles – although less populous – only 12.1 million people

Mulino, 2002). Relevant edited volumes about Italian colonialism, include Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds, *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Giampaolo Calchi Novati, *L'Africa d'Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2011); Bianca Maria Caranguiu and Tekeste Negash, *L'Africa orientale italiana nel dibattito storico* (Rome: Carocci, 2007); Uldelul Chelati Dirar, Silvana Palma, Alessandro Triulzi and Alessandro Volterra, *Colonia e postcolonia come spazi diasporici: Attraversamenti di memorie, identità e confine nel Corno d'Africa* (Rome: Carocci, 2011), and Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). On colonialism in Eritrea see Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1987), Irma Taddia, *L'Eritrea-colonia, 1890–1952: paesaggi, strutture, uomini del colonialismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), and Gerald Kennedy Nicholas Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition: 1941–1952* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960). On colonialism in Ethiopia see Roberto Bottoni, ed., *L'Impero fascista, Italia ed Etopia (1935–1941)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), and Mariam Larebo Haile, *The Building of an Empire: Italian Land Policy and Practice in Ethiopia, 1935–1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). On colonialism in Somalia and the Italian Trusteeship administration see respectively Robert Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) and Antonio Maria Morone, *L'ultima colonia. Come L'Italia è tornata in Africa* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2011). On the cultural legacy of Italian colonialism see Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds, *National Belongings. Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), and Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds, *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

lived in the Horn of Africa while 42 million people lived in Italy in 1936 – than its own.³

Italy established its first presence in the Horn of Africa in 1869 when an Italian Lazarist missionary, Giuseppe Sapeto, purchased the Red Sea port of Assab from a local sultan for a mere 6,000 Maria Theresa dollars. The port was declared an Italian colony in 1882 and this was subsequently followed by the acquisition of another port to the north, Massawa, in 1885. The latter would become a springboard for the conquest of what would become Eritrea, completed in 1890, and the invasion of Ethiopia, which failed in 1895 and succeeded in 1935. Eritrea, which was occupied in a war that in a single incident saw the death of 500 Italian soldiers at the battle of Dogali in 1887,⁴ would become Italy's first major possession in Africa. Eritrea as such represented the fulfilment of Italy's dream of creating an overseas colony in Africa.⁵ However, the Italian leadership was aware that Eritrea was not a viable colony in itself and therefore aimed at conquering the fertile lands further south, in Ethiopia.

The height of the crisis between Italy and Ethiopia was reached when Art. 17 of an official agreement signed between the two countries – the 1889 Treaty of Wuchale – was translated in starkly different ways. The Ethiopian version reduced Italy to the position of a messenger while the Italian one made Ethiopia a protectorate of Italy.⁶ War came in 1895 at Amba Alage in northern Ethiopia, where the Italians lost. However, the most decisive battle took place on 1 March 1896, when Italy lost a major battle at Adwa. The echo of the victory, which was reminiscent of Haiti's successful uprising from 1791 to 1804, was felt far and wide especially in Africa and across the Atlantic. Black people in colonial and racial bondage embraced Adwa, and

- 3 ISTAT, 'L'Italia in 150 anni: Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861–2010', *istat.it* <http://www3.istat.it/dati/catalogo/20120118_00/cap_2.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2017), 135; and Royal Institute of International Affairs, 'Italian Possessions in Africa II: Italian East Africa', *Bulletin of International News* 17/17 (1940), 1065–1074.
- 4 Scott B. Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism* (London: Pearson, 1996), 16–17.
- 5 See Tekeste, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact*; and Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition: 1941–1952*.
- 6 Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

Ethiopia at large, as a beacon of hope and freedom and a veritable symbol of their pride. The long-term significance of the victory included the birth of Ethiopianism as well as the Pan-Africanist vision of continental unity.⁷

The defeat led to the fall of Crispi's government and the postponement of Italy's colonial ambitions over Ethiopia until 1935, when Italy – by now under the fascist leadership of Benito Mussolini – came back well prepared and determined to erase the shame of defeat. Marshal Rodolfo Graziani – who would become responsible for the massacre of at least 19,000 civilians in a killing spree that lasted three days starting on 19 February 1937⁸ – is said to have promised to deliver Ethiopia to Mussolini 'with the Ethiopians or without them, just as he pleases'.⁹ Ethiopia, ill-equipped and ill-prepared, lost the war and was conquered. The occupation was brief by comparison to other colonies in the Horn of Africa, lasting from 1936 to 1941, but changes brought in those years were long lasting. While Italian colonial expansion in the Horn of Africa occurred within the framework of European colonialism and was fundamentally part of a larger process, it was characterized by 'the vigor of the young and the desperation of the latecomer',¹⁰ a condition that partly explained the acute sense of inferiority the Italians felt in Europe and the brutality of Italian colonial violence in Africa, including the use of mustard gas in Ethiopia in the 1935–1936 war of occupation.¹¹

Somalia was the last territory in the Horn to be subjected to Italy's expansion. The coastal areas of the Benadir had been under Arab – and in particular Zanzibari – influence and control, throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the late nineteenth century, the area was gradually drawn into the ongoing European colonial rivalry. Four powers

7 Rexford Henry Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire, 1813–1889* (London: Heinemann, 1975); and Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

8 Ian Campbell, *The Addis Ababa Massacre: Italy's National Shame* (London: Hurst, 2014).

9 Angelo Del Boca, quoted in Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1885–1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991), 157. It should be noted that Bahru provides a larger figure of Graziani's killings: 30,000.

10 Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1885–1974*, 125.

11 Ian Campbell, *The Plot to Kill Graziani: The Attempted Assassination of Mussolini's Viceroy* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2010).

were involved in the division of the Somali lands: Britain, France, Italy, and Ethiopia. For the first three, the interest in Somalia, and the Horn of Africa at large, stemmed from the longstanding imperial ambitions in the Red Sea Coast whose strategic significance as an international waterway increased following the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869. The concern of the then Ethiopian leadership was creating a buffer zone that would protect the hinterland from foreign aggression. Treaties with various Somali clans – such as those signed with Britain in 1884 and 1886 and with Italy in 1889 –¹² often preceded the formal occupation of their lands. There was, however, widespread resistance, like the one led by *Sayyid* Muhammed Abdulle Hassan, against the four occupying powers in the 1910s and 1920s, although they often ended in the defeat of the Somalis.

Treaties were also signed between rival powers that were engaged in extending their colonial dominion, including the Anglo-French agreement in 1888, Anglo-Italian protocols in 1891, 1894 and 1931, and those between Ethiopia and France (1897), Ethiopia and Britain (1897) and Ethiopia and Italy (1897 and 1908). The aims of such treaties were the mutual recognition of possessions and the delimitation of new colonial boundaries, which were rarely demarcated. However, these treaties were made almost invariably with no consideration of clan or ethnic distribution and grazing needs.¹³ By 1897, the partition of Somalia was virtually completed through treaties and expansions made by different foreign parties. Somalia officially became an Italian colony in 1905. In 1936, following the defeat and occupation of Ethiopia, Italy declared the creation of a new colonial empire, *Africa Orientale Italiana* [Italian East Africa], which comprised Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Italian Somalia.

Four days after the conquest, on 9 May 1936, the new Italian Empire, headquartered in Addis Ababa, was divided into six provinces, each with its own capital city: Amhara (whose capital was Gondar), Eritrea (Asmara), Harar (Harar), Somalia (Mogadishu), Shewa (Addis Ababa), and Galla [Oromo]-Sidama (Jimma). A highly bureaucratic and centralized

12 Ioan Myrddin Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia* (London: Longman, 1980), 46–47.

13 Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, 98–99.

administrative system, more in line with the practices of direct rule, was installed. It consisted of a hierarchy of officials starting at the top with a viceroy based in Addis Ababa, six governors in the six provincial capitals, and a few subordinates and secretaries, in the provinces and districts. At the bottom of the structure were local leaders and elders paid by the colonizing government who provided the link between Italian officials and the people while enjoying only limited administrative and judicial powers.¹⁴

The Political and Economic Context of the Colonial Enterprise

The origin of Italian colonialism in Africa is largely to be found in European history, specifically political and economic rivalry between European powers and the consequential search for overseas markets, raw materials, and cheap labour.¹⁵ An important development in this context was the rise of jingoistic nationalism, which was used to justify overseas military adventures. These changes in the European economy and society strengthened the conditions for colonial expansion and empire building, subsequently setting in motion a violent scramble for the continent of Africa after the mid-1880s.

The colonial project from the outset was also predicated on an ideological and political discourse that sought to rationalize European conquest and domination of Africans. As Frantz Fanon points out, 'colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. [...] it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it'.¹⁶ Fanon shows

14 Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1985).

15 Adu Bohan, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

16 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 210.

that historical erasure was one of the most common strategies of the colonizers to demonstrate their supposed cultural supremacy. An important strategy was the production of an irreconcilable difference between Europe and Africa in which the former was seen as synonymous with civilization and the latter with backwardness, devoid of reason and incapable of moral sense or rational thinking.¹⁷ This artificial but consequential opposition between the familiar – Italy, Europe, 'us' – and the unfamiliar – Africa, 'them' – was crucial to European self-conception, as it not only dehumanized Africans but also created the condition for legitimating their enslavement and the colonization of the continent. Muriel Chamberlain argues that supporters of the slave trade saw Africans as little more than subhuman creatures or 'a degenerated form of humanity that slavery [and eventually colonialism] was a desirable condition for [them]'.¹⁸

The racialization and naturalization of difference can be seen in the social Darwinian language of 'survival of the fittest', the overtly racist metaphor of 'the civilizing mission', or the European construction of Africa as the 'Dark Continent'. Accordingly, by the latter half of the nineteenth century colonialism was seen as a project that was both inevitable, not least achievable (because of European might), and desirable (as an instrument of bringing Africa into a narrative of European progress). As Scott Cook argues:

In most instances of formal colonialism both economic (trade, the domestic socio-economic climate, and overseas investment, production, and development prospects) and what might be termed 'state politics' (global strategy, military power, nationalism, international standing, and domestic politics) interacted as traders, producers, financiers, prospectors, and speculators combined with military officers, colonial officials, missionaries, politicians to shape key events and conditions.¹⁹

17 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Female Body* (Durban: University of Natal, 1998).

18 Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York; London: Longman, 1974), 19.

19 Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism*, 22–23.

The second aspect of the colonial project refers to the nature of colonial conquest, including what triggered the 'scramble', which is interpreted in as varied and controversial ways as the causes and character of colonialism itself. A convergence of developments led to a surge of reactive and pre-emptive colonization. Cook lists a combination of events that heightened tension among European powers and contributed to a rush for the conquest of the continent: 'France's invasion of Tunisia (1881), British occupation of Egypt (1882), Belgium's King Leopold's offensive in the Congo (early 1880s); and Germany's sudden taking of Cameroon, Southwest Africa, Tanganyika, and Togoland (1884–1885)'.²⁰

In this regard, the Italian occupation of the Horn of Africa generally followed a trajectory that was established in similar colonial adventures in Africa by other European powers. For instance, Italy adhered to the parameters set by the Berlin Conference (November 1884–February 1885), which laid down the ground rules for European colonization including, but not limited to, the establishment of the principle of effective occupation. At the same time, Italy proceeded to incrementally occupy territories as it signed a series of bilateral agreements with Africans and Europeans alike, a practice that accounted for the real division of much of the Horn of Africa and the rest of the continent in the 1880s and 1890s. While the metaphor of the 'scramble for Africa' would suggest a confused rush to divide up the continent, Italian and European colonial expansion was also protracted, violent, and destructive.

Constructing Colonies, Reinventing the Metropole

The colonial project was organized around a paradigm of difference and a hierarchy of values in which Europe had the right and duty to bring civilization to Africa. This racist and pseudo-scientific belief formed the context

20 Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism*, 9.

in which the colonial state sought to remake colonial bodies and spaces, on unequal terms, often through the instrumentality of violence.²¹ A case in point is the reorganization of African urban spaces as a replica, poor and confused, of the metropolises that were present in the colonizing states.

The colonies were seen as little more than empty and desert stages only useful for the enactment of European drama, a perspective entrenched by the idea of Africa as an ahistorical blank space outside of both geography and time. The colonial 'virgin fantasy',²² widespread among the political elite and urban planners, was that blank-slate planning in the colonies was possible as they had no urban element of historical value to be preserved. The erasure of precolonial achievements – in both discourse and practice – was pivotal to imagining and constructing entirely European realities on colonized spaces.²³ The story of Italian colonial rule in the Horn of Africa and, specifically, their determination to design and inscribe smaller replicas or copies of Italy or Rome, exemplifies this intense desire to superimpose an 'organized, subdivided vision of colonial Italian society' on African spaces that were either obliterated or reconfigured.²⁴

Italy largely failed in its first objective of demographic colonialism and the number of colonists in Africa was significantly smaller than originally planned. Tables 0.1 and 0.2 show the number of Italian civilians, both men and women,²⁵ living in the East African colonies in 1939 (in which the percentage of women was very small, amounting to 26,628).

21 Richard Pankhurst, 'Racism in the Service of Fascism: Empire Building and War. The History of the Italian Fascist Magazine "La Difesa della Razza"', *marxists.org* <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/pankhurst-richard/2007/03/x01.htm>> (accessed 3 May 2017), 1–4.

22 Mia Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are: Fascist Plans for the Colonial City of Addis Ababa and the Colonizing Suburb of EUR '42'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.2 (1996), 403.

23 David Rifkind, 'Gondar: Architecture and Urbanism for Italy's Fascist Empire', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 70.4 (December 2011), 492–511.

24 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 403.

25 Hailemariam Larebo, *The Building of an Empire: Italian Land Policy and Practice in Ethiopia 1935–1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 165, 267.

Table 0.1: Italian Civilians in AOI in 1939

<i>District</i>	<i>Italian Civilians</i>	<i>%</i>
Eritrea	72,408	43.8
Shewa	40,698	24.6
Somalia	19,200	11.6
Galla [Oromo] – Sidama	11,823	7.2
Amhara	10,103	6.7
Harar	10,035	6.1
Total	165,267	100

Table 0.2: Italian Women in AOI in 1939

<i>District</i>	<i>Italian Civilians</i>	<i>%</i>
Eritrea	14,827	20.5
Shewa	6,564	16.1
Somalia	2,287	11.9
Harar	1,350	13.5
Amhara	946	8.5
Galla [Oromo] – Sidama	654	5.5
Total	22,628	100

Nevertheless, the urban domain of Italian colonialism, the building of new cities in particular, enjoyed considerable success. The argument was that a colonial city provided a greater opportunity to reflect the colonizer's history as a powerful and conquering nation but also to create and reinforce its power and prestige in the minds of colonial subjects. For instance, monumental architecture, often located at higher ground or in central places, enabled cognitive dominance by providing exposure and visibility to the colonial state.²⁶ It also served as a point of surveillance and observation, and as a powerful reminder of colonial grandeur. In this regard, mention

26 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 405.

should be made of the profoundly racist nature of Italian colonial urban modernity.²⁷ One example is the racialization of urban space – both social and physical (mediated through urban planning and architecture) – and social relationships, involving the prohibition of mixed-race unions between Italians and the 'natives' (*meticciato*). Urban zoning in the colonial cities of Italian East Africa (as in other European colonies), such as Addis Ababa, the colonial capital city, as well as Asmara and Mogadishu, became more about racial and ethnic zoning than about the zoning of buildings and activities.²⁸ Most urban centres in the colonies therefore had two sections, one called a European 'city' and the other a 'native quarter' which lacked basic amenities, both separated from and protected by natural barricades of vegetation and rivers. Urban segregation, however, was never total or complete. Movement and exchange between the two areas was partly possible because of the colonists' need for native domestic labour and products.²⁹ Some form of segregation was also extended to the 'native quarter' which was further subdivided into separate sections based on ethnic, racial, and religious differences.

Segregation in the colonies also had a gendered nature. The black female body became commodified and objectified, and earlier liaisons between Italian men and African women which the colonial state encouraged through a wave of sexualized propaganda gave way to a condemnation of interracial sexual relationships. The view of colonized women as a stabilizing force on colonial social order and health by providing the 'comforts of home'³⁰ to Italian settlers changed to one in which they were seen as a threat to the ideology of Italian racial and moral purity and superiority.³¹

27 Fuller, 'Building Power', 479.

28 Fuller, 'Building Power', 479; Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge, 2007), 32, and AlSayyad, *Forms of Dominance*, 5.

29 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 405.

30 Ruth Iyob, 'Madamismo and Beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women', in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds, *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 233.

31 Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 161.

Social apartheid was subsequently imposed in a series of racial laws between 1937 and 1940 which penalized any interracial relationships and denied citizenship to *meticci* children.³²

However, implementing Italian colonial policies was not as easy as passing them, and the failure of those policies resulted partly from a misreading of local conditions, both in Italy and its African colonies. To begin with, the policies were too ambitious. One can mention the plan to settle hundreds of thousands of Italian farmers in Ethiopia and other colonies or build entirely new cities and societies. Besides, the resources that were needed to achieve those objectives were not provided or not enough. Local resistance, especially in Ethiopia, further complicated the execution of those policies. The policy of maintaining Italian racial purity by condemning cohabitation with local women conflicted with the reality of the shortage of white women in the colonies. The practice of sending Italian and French women, including prostitutes, to Africa was short-lived, as it was considered immoral by many and was inadequate for the needs.³³ Another example was the colonial policy of urban spatial and social segregation which was undermined in practice by the imperative for negotiation and interaction between the two groups.

A critical factor that contributed to the subversion of Italian colonial policies was the reframing practices of the colonized. Colonized subjects, both men and women, were able to use their agency to subvert colonial designs and exploit the weaknesses of the colonial state to their own advantage. In many occasions, the colonial state had to resort to negotiation or find a compromise with its colonized, but not completely disempowered, subjects. Italy's colonial enterprise in the Horn of Africa was characterized

32 Giulia Barrera, 'Dangerous Liaisons: Colonial Concubinage in Eritrea 1890s–1941', *PAS Working Papers No. 1* <<http://www.africanstudies.northwestern.edu/publications-research/working-papers.html>> (accessed 4 August 2017); Giulia Barrera, 'Mussolini's Colonial Race Laws and State-Settler Relations in Africa Orientale Italiana (1935–1941)', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8.3 (2003), 425–443; and Pankhurst, 'Racism in the Service of Fascism', 1–32.

33 Sandra Ponzanesi, 'The Color of Love: Madamismo and Interracial Relationships in the Italian Colonies', *Research in African Literatures*, 43.2 (2012), 162.

by complex entanglement and hybridity, not to mention the ambivalence that characterized the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer.³⁴ What emerged eventually was a situation in which transactions were dense and boundaries were often crossed. The fact that the physical and social landscape of Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa resembled more the everyday practices of the colonized than the designs of the colonizer, both during and in the aftermath of the demise of colonialism, is a testimony as much to the reframing power of the colonized subject as to the complexity of the encounter between the two. Nevertheless, the power of colonial and colonizing modernity or the social, psychological, and physical impact of colonial policies and practices cannot be underestimated.

Decolonization and the Legacy of Colonialism

The achievement of African independence was never smooth as colonial powers tried, albeit in vain, to delay or deny it. However, several factors made the recovery of independence inevitable, including armed resistance and organized nationalist political struggle. Armed resistance corroded the strength and morale of the colonial state whereas the Second World War (1939–1945) hastened its eventual demise. The aftereffects of the war intensified armed resistance but also fostered the rise of organized political movements that demanded national liberation for their respective territories. The collapse of Italy's African empire, for instance, was directly linked to Italy's decision to join the war on the side of Nazi Germany in 1940, and its eventual defeat and surrender to the Allied Powers in 1943.

A war of resistance ended Italian occupation in Ethiopia in 1941 whereas Eritrea was brought under British trusteeship following Italy's defeat in the Second World War in the same year. A referendum federated

34 Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952. Italian Somalia was placed under British protection for almost ten years (1941–1949) and then Italian administration under UN tutelage (hereafter AFIS, Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia) from 1950 to 1960, when Italian and British Somalilands were unified as an independent country.³⁵ However, decolonization should not be seen as representing a rupture or a complete break from the colonial past as the colonial period had enduring effects. Interpretations of the colonial legacy are riven by controversies, both ideological and intellectual, and the complexity of colonial inheritance cannot be captured within the constraining prism of ‘benefits versus deficits’.

The legacy of Italian colonialism, in all its complexity and multiplicity, is still visible on the postcolonial landscape. For instance, recent configurations in the Horn of Africa which led to the emergence of independent Eritrea in 1993 and the de facto fragmentation of Somalia along old colonial lines – British and Italian Somalilands – suggest an unsettling resemblance to conditions during the colonial period.³⁶ The encounter engendered by the Italian conquest of the Horn of Africa was by no means peaceful, simple and one-directional. It was complex, evolving, and interpenetrating, changing in the process both the colonized and the colonizer. The Italian interlude in the Horn of Africa was of short duration compared to that of many European colonies in Africa. But it was an interlude that changed the direction and momentum of the region’s history as well as the relations between the two areas. The histories of Italy and the Horn of Africa are now forever tied because of colonialism and its aftereffects, including

35 Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia: Rome and Mogadishu from Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), 99–100.

36 Giampaolo Calchi Novati, ‘National Identities as a By-Product of Italian Colonialism: A Comparison of Eritrea and Somalia’, in Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 47–74; Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut, eds, *Unfinished Business: Ethiopia and Eritrea at War* (Trenton; Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 2004); and Bereketeb Redie, *Eritrea: The Making of a Nation, 1890–1991* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2000).

migration, which has in fact become a powerful bond that has united the two in the decades since decolonization.

‘We Are Here Because You Were There’: Transnational Migrations

The Italian legal system conforms to the generally recognised principles of international law. The legal status of foreigners is regulated by law in conformity with international provisions and treaties. A foreigner who, in his home country, is denied the actual exercise of the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Italian constitution shall be entitled to the right of asylum under the conditions established by law. A foreigner may not be extradited for a political offence.³⁷

Every man is free to leave his land.³⁸

Italy is often a first arrival point in Europe for immigrants from the Horn of Africa. Indeed, migrations from former colonies to Italy started at the end of the Second World War, and they have dramatically increased in the last thirty years.³⁹ The United Nations Human Rights Council provides up-to-date information about the growing number of those who die at the borders of Europe or attempting to reach its shores, many of whom are Somalis and Eritreans.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that some migrants come from

37 Senato della Repubblica, ‘Constitution of the Italian Republic’, *senato.it* <https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2017), Art. 10, 6.

38 United Nations, ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, *un.org* <http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2017), Art. 13, 37.

39 Antonio Maria Morone, ‘L’Italianità degli altri. Le migrazioni degli ex sudditi coloniali dall’Africa all’Italia’, *Altreitalie* 50 (2015), 71–86.

40 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘Operational Portal Refugees Situation’, *unhcr.org* <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php#_ga=1.171726693.475366661.1485267876> (accessed 4 August 2017).

Italy's former colonies, many Italians are still unaware of the colonial history of their country. Arguably, what historian Angelo del Boca calls 'the missed debate on Italian colonialism'⁴¹ has left Italy unprepared to confront its postcolonial present and contemporary challenges. One example is the hysterical and often racist ways with which the Italian media has reacted to immigrants from Africa, including its former colonies.⁴² Many immigrants from ex-colonies therefore find themselves suspended between 'not being here and not being there' simultaneously, a precarious condition of existence, which is not only metaphorical, but also legal.

In order to introduce this most recent encounter between Italy and its former colonies and to explain the reasons why Italy is frequently not the final destination for refugee seekers, it might be useful to underscore Italy's position as one of the European countries involved in migrant regulation and containment operations. The European Union is a post-national space: the Schengen Agreement was first signed in 1985 and it eliminated internal borders between Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.⁴³ Italy joined these countries in 1990, and the agreement became operative in 1997. While frontiers were abolished between these European countries at that time, new boundaries were created to stop immigrants. Until the Martelli Law (Law 39/1990) – which was introduced to implement the European policies on immigration – there was no law to regulate migration to Italy, instead there was a set of administrative measures.⁴⁴ The 1998 Turco Napolitano Law (Law 40/1998) created identification centres – initially called CPTs, *Centri di Permanenza Temporanea* [Centres of Temporary Permanence] – which 'made immigrant detention

41 Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli Italiani: miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1992), 11.

42 Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver and Federico Faloppa, eds, *Destination Italy* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 29–200.

43 It should be noted that several European countries, such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Sweden temporarily suspended the Schengen Agreement in 2016 in order to better regulate immigration.

44 Ferruccio Pastore, 'Migrazioni internazionali e ordinamento giuridico', in Luciano Violante, ed., *Annali della Storia d'Italia. Legge Diritto Giustizia*, vol. 14 (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), 1035.

an ordinary means of control' under specific conditions,⁴⁵ and it introduced the 'push-backs' of migrants without juridical consent. Both practices were based on the creation of spaces – within and outside the nation – where laws could be suspended.

The Bossi Fini Law (Law 189/2002), which became executive in 2003, envisaged four different kinds of migration centres.⁴⁶ First, the *Centri di primo soccorso e accoglienza* [Centres of First Aid and Welcoming] (CPSA), where migrants who first reach Italy receive medical first aid, are identified and are moved to three other kinds of centres according to their specific needs. *Centri di prima accoglienza* [Centres of First Welcoming] (CDA) – created in the mid-1990s – house foreigners during the time that is necessary to identify them. *Centri di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo* [Welcoming Centres for Refugee Seekers] (CARA) are centres for refugees who seek international protection. As Giuseppe Campesi has argued, CARAs often 'take the form of hybrid structures, halfway between a sorting or processing centre housing asylum seekers and an informal settlement crowded with migrants or refugees looking for a place to sleep at night'.⁴⁷ *Centri di identificazione ed espulsione* [Centres for Identification and Expulsion] (CIE) are centres for detention of illegal migrants, and they took the place of CPTs in 2008. The CIE of Lampedusa – where the majority of migrants to Italy went after Italy signed a bilateral agreement with Albania in 1991, thus blocking migration from the eastern route⁴⁸ – is the symbol of these spaces of exception and juridical void within the European Union. The Bossi Fini Law extended the initial function of first identification and

45 Giuseppe Campesi, 'Immigration Detention and the Double Logic of Securitization in Italy', in Michela Ceccorulli and Nicola Labanca, eds, *The EU, Migration and the Politics of Administrative Detention* (London: Routledge, 2014), 151.

46 Ministero dell'Interno, 'Immigrazione e asilo', *interno.gov.it* <<http://www.interno.gov.it/it/temi/immigrazione-e-asilo/sistema-accoglienza-sul-territorio/centri-limmigrazione>> (accessed 3 May 2017).

47 Giuseppe Campesi, 'Humanitarian Confinement: an Ethnography of Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers at Europe's Southern Border', *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, 1.4 (2015), 415.

48 Giuseppe Campesi, *Polizia della frontiera: Frontex e la produzione dello spazio europeo* (Rome: Deriveapprodi, 2016), 176.

transformed the centres into detention centres, where migrants could be held for six months, rather than the earlier limit of sixty days.⁴⁹

According to Claudia Pretto and Simone Penasa, on 1 October 2015 the composition of the Italian reception system changed, creating three different reception facilities:⁵⁰ the first reception centres, which include CPSA and CDA/CARA; the emergency reception centres – or *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (CAS), created in 2013 as a response to the Syrian political crisis – where migrants are housed until their requests for international protections are processed; and the project named SPRAR – the acronym of *Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati* [Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees] – which has been active since 2003 and aims to integrate refugees within small communities and with a small number of facilities.⁵¹ This system can be described as multi-level: migrants who arrive to Italy are first registered in EU-run reception centres called hotspots, and they are later moved to another centre according to their needs, their requests and refugee status. The roadmap to the ‘hotspot approach’ that Italy discussed and signed with other members of the European Union on 25 and 26 June 2015 is very unclear and has a legally uncertain nature.⁵² For instance, Pretto and Penasa argue that it is difficult to decide whether hotspots provide healthcare and first aid or if

49 Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro: Dall'emergenza umanitaria allo stato di eccezione* (Rome: Aracne, 2012), 23.

50 Claudia Pretto and Simone Penasa, ‘The Italian Reception System’, in Paul Minderhoud and Karin Zwaan, eds, *The Recast Conditions Directive: Central Themes, Problem Issues, and Implementation in Selected Member States* (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publisher, 2017), 97–112.

51 Marco Accorinti ‘Centri di accoglienza: varietà tipologica e dibattito collegato’, *La Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, 2–3 (2015), 179–200. More information about the composition of Italian migration centres is available at: AIDA Asylum Information Database. ‘Reception Condition Italy’. *asylumineurope.org* <<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/reception-conditions/>> (accessed 4 August 2017).

52 See Yasha Maccanico, ‘The Italian Roadmap 2015: Hotspots, Readmissions, Asylum Procedures and the Re-opening of Detention Centres’, *statewatch.org* <<http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/dec/no-279-Italian-Road-Map-2015.pdf>> (accessed 4 August 2017).

they are centres of identification and expulsion. This definition is crucial to understanding the legal warranties that are granted to the asylum seeker.

Five main critiques have been made of Italian migration centres regarding their respect of human rights or lack thereof.⁵³ First, accountability is limited and some NGOs have denounced the lack of access to correct information.⁵⁴ For instance, journalists and even politicians face limitations in the monitoring of CIEs, which in 2011 were arguably ‘more “closed” even than maximum security prisons’.⁵⁵ Second, Fabrizio Gatti’s 2005 reportage documented police abuse and violation of human rights including the right to a healthy environment, the right not to be subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to be informed on the right to ask for protection, the right to have a defence lawyer, the right to ask for political asylum, and the right to appeal against a sentence. It should be noted that torture is still not a specific crime in Italy, therefore the physical and psychological suffering of victims of police brutality is equal to a generic act of violence without any aggravating factor.⁵⁶ Third, the police have large discretionary powers to screen migrants and direct them to CIE or CARA according to their nationality – or their skin tone⁵⁷ – rather than analysing first their asylum request.⁵⁸ In other words, political and administrative decisions seem to prevail over the law.⁵⁹ Fourth, between 700,000 and

53 In this regard, see Sonia Paone, *Città in frantumi. Sicurezza, emergenza e produzione dello spazio* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008); Marco Rovelli, *Lager italiani* (Milan: BUR, 2006), and Medici per i Diritti Umani, *Arcipelago CIE. Indagine sui centri di identificazione ed espulsione italiani* (Formigine: Infinito Edizioni, 2013).

54 A fundamental website on this issue is that of the European Council of Refugee Rights: <<http://www.ecre.org/>>.

55 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 67.

56 Fabrizio Gatti, ‘Io clandestino a Lampedusa’, *espresso.repubblica.it*, <<http://espresso.repubblica.it/palazzo/2005/10/07/news/io-clandestino-a-lampedusa-1.594>> (accessed 21 August 2017).

57 Christopher Hein, ‘Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia’, in Christopher Hein, ed., *Rifugiati: Vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 78.

58 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 117; and Campesi, *Polizia della frontiera*, 150.

59 Simone Penasa, ‘Quando l’eccezione diventa regola (rità): garanzie costituzionali negli spazi di restrizione della libertà personale. Carceri e Cie’, in Sergio Bonini,

800,000 euros per year are employed to run centres for immigrants, and managers of some of these centres have used this money for their own profit rather than for assisting immigrants.⁶⁰ Last, it is not clear whether these structures are reception centres or holding camps, therefore administrative infractions – such as the absence of identification papers – are treated as if they were criminal offences. Critiques about accountability, police brutality, violation of human rights, and the criminalization of refugees have also been focused on the ‘hotspot’ approach.⁶¹ Amnesty International’s 2016 report on immigration shows that asylum seekers are not granted their right to be properly informed about their status and rights, and cannot count on the support of translators, members of humanitarian organizations or lawyers. The police have complete discretion to decide whether to admit or expel migrants.

Despite this criticism, on 12 April 2017 Legislative Decree 13/2017 on immigration, also known as ‘Minniti-Orlando’, was approved by the Italian parliament. Decree 13/2017 created sixteen new CIEs to detain 1,600 immigrants in total, and make asylum seekers work without retribution while waiting for the decision about their refugee status. It also introduced a special tribunal that decides – without any possibility for appeal – whether an immigrant is granted refugee status. The asylum seeker will no longer be given the opportunity to be questioned in a court, but he or she will have a video recording of their testimony evaluated by judges specializing in migration issues.

Lucia Busatta and Ilaria Marchi, eds, *L'eccezione del diritto. Atti della giornata di studio (Trento, 31 ottobre 2013)* (Trento: Università di Trento, 2015), 141–168.

60 Stefano Liberti, ‘Il grande affare dei centri di accoglienza’, *internazionale.it* <<http://www.internazionale.it/reportage/2014/12/03/il-grande-affare-dei-centri-d-accolgenza>> (accessed 3 May 2017).

61 Giuseppe Morgese, ‘Recenti iniziative dell’Unione europea per affrontare la crisi dei rifugiati’, *Diritto, immigrazione e cittadinanza*, 27.3–4 (2015), 15–49; and Paolo Cuttitta, ‘The Way to the Italian Hotspots. The Space of the Sea Between Reception and Containment’, *societyandspace.org* <<http://societyandspace.org/2016/11/15/the-way-to-the-italian-hotspots-the-space-of-the-sea-between-reception-and-containment/>> (accessed 3 May 2017).

Italy’s frontiers are also patrolled thanks to bilateral agreements, such as that between Italy and Libya, the country from which the majority of refugees from the Horn of Africa attempt to reach Europe.⁶² These agreements have not been made public and they are ‘very unclear’, inasmuch as they can be seen as a way to disempower the parliament and the law.⁶³ The first agreements between Italy and Libya were signed in 2003 and became operative in 2004. They resulted in joint police operations and the construction of three centres of detention for migrants in Libya financed by Italy, among many other collaborative projects.⁶⁴ They also involved collective deportations on charter flights, which happened without the consent of parliament or international law.⁶⁵ From 2004 to 2006, more than 4,000 people were deported to Libya, including Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese citizens, who were denied the right to ask for political asylum in Lampedusa, thus infringing Art. 2 and Art. 4 of the 1998 Italian Unified code on immigration n. 286 and the Art. 18 on the Right to Asylum of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union.⁶⁶ This document also prohibits deportations (Art. 19) and the use of inhuman or degrading treatments or punishments (Art. 4).⁶⁷ As Libya was not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva convention about refugee rights, Italy has exposed asylum seekers to possible torture.

The Prodi government (2006–2008) applied a no push-backs ‘with some exceptions’ policy through three European missions called *Nautilus*,⁶⁸ but it also signed new protocols with Libya in 2007 and gave this country seven fast patrol boats. The protocols precluded an

62 Concerning contemporary migration to Libya, see Antonio Maria Morone, ‘La Libia, crocevia migratorio. Nuove e vecchie dinamiche dal 2011 al 2014’, in Luca Ciabbari, ed., *I Rifugiati e l’Europa. Tra crisi internazionali e corridoi d’accesso* (Milan: Cortina, 2015), 59–79.

63 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 85.

64 Emanuela Paoletti, ‘Power Relations and International Migration: the Case of Italy and Libya’, *Political Studies*, 59.2 (2011), 269–289.

65 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 84.

66 Hein, ‘Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia’, 75.

67 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 18.

68 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 44.

agreement, signed in 2008 by Silvio Berlusconi and Muammar Gaddafi. Italy committed to pay Libya 5 billion dollars in the next twenty years as compensation for its thirty-year occupation of the country, which lasted from 1911 to 1943.⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that this acknowledgement of Italy's colonial responsibilities was not followed by any other institutional actions. On the other hand, the native villages of Italian high-ranking officers Pietro Badoglio and Rodolfo Graziani, who were both responsible for atrocities in Africa, have celebrated them by creating respectively a museum⁷⁰ and a mausoleum.⁷¹ Moreover, on 26 September 2016, a barracks in Pantelleria was named in honour of Major Siragusa Antonino for fighting against the Libyan resistance in 1918. Indeed, on 26 February 2011 the minister of defence in Berlusconi's government, Ignazio La Russa, said that the most important part of the Friendship Treaty with Libya was the control of frontiers rather than the establishment of a new direction in the relations between the two countries. As Cristina Lombardi Diop and Caterina Romeo argue: 'Contemporary transnational immigrations have not only reactivated colonial memories in different European countries, but they have also shown how the effects of colonialism could not be confined to a distant place and time'.⁷²

In exchange for the compensation, Libya would have received military resources to stop migrants entering Europe. Despite the fact that deportations in 2004–2005 raised protests and concerns,⁷³ from 2009 Italy started

69 Hein, 'Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia', 79.

70 Giuseppe Prozio, 'Nel paese dove nacquero il Monferrato e Badoglio', *lastampa.it* <<http://www.lastampa.it/2016/09/03/edizioni/asti/nel-paese-dove-nacquero-il-monferrato-e-badoglio-04QqOKAeMw8WhXjMPk4ygK/pagina.html>> (accessed 4 August 2017).

71 Antonio Maria Morone, 'The Trouble with Italy's Post-Colonial Memory: Affile Celebrates Rodolfo Graziani, the "Butcher of Ethiopia"', *ARIA Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 11 (2012), 25–29.

72 Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, 'Italy's Postcolonial 'Question': Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe', *Postcolonial Studies*, 18.4 (2015), 369.

73 Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2006*, <<http://pantheon.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k6/wr2006.pdf>> (accessed 4 August 2017).

a systematic push-backs at sea in international waters towards Libya.⁷⁴ Although it was very difficult to monitor police operations that occurred in the open sea and in international waters, Enrico Calamai argues that 'the staff of Italian boats have been documented as failing in their duty to rescue boats full of people in danger and [...] forcefully towing boats carrying migrants and refugees back to Libyan government boats, which return them to Africa'.⁷⁵ Other abuses were also reported, including the requisition of personal effects.⁷⁶ Push-backs at sea did not reduce the number of entries from 2008 to 2010 as the number of clandestine migrants coming to Italy through 'overland, grew in an exponential way'.⁷⁷ However, these measures decreased the number of those who requested refugee status in Italy.

The laws that this practice openly violates include the 1989 Convention on the Right of the Child – in particular the rights of unaccompanied minors and separated children to receive assistance – and the 1979 Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, a treaty to which Italy acceded in 1989, which compels boats to help castaways and take them to a safe harbour.⁷⁸ Moreover, push-backs involved several violations punishable under Italian laws including failure in the duty of care, duress, kidnapping and abuse of power, since 'the border police has no competence to evaluate whether asylum requests are admissible'.⁷⁹ Push-backs were condemned for violating the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union in June 2012 (Hirsi vs. Italy), showing that the respect of human rights must also be applied in international waters, outside the territories of the nation. However, Italy continued its containment policies thanks to the protocols

74 It was not the first time that Italy used push-backs, as this practice was first employed in 1997 to return Albanian refugees who were escaping to Italy after the fall of Enver Ocha's regime. See Hein, 'Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia', 56.

75 Enrico Calamai, 'Una riflessione geopolitica', in Christopher Hein, ed., *Rifugiati: Vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 30.

76 Maria De Donato, 'Le nuove minacce: respingimento, esclusione, ostilità', in Christopher Hein, ed., *Rifugiati: Vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 246.

77 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 47.

78 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 41.

79 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 45, 63.

it signed with the Libyan authorities that succeeded Muammar Gaddafi's regime in January 2012; 968 migrants in 2012 and 3,918 in 2013 were intercepted in international waters and sent back to Tunisia and Libya,⁸⁰ a country where holding camps are still operative.⁸¹ Deportations toward Egypt and Tunisia of those who were escaping these countries during the 'Arab Spring' season continued thanks to the bilateral agreements Italy had signed with these countries respectively in 2001 and 1998.⁸²

The laws on the right to asylum also regulate the movement of people from the Horn of Africa to Italy. In 1954, Italy ratified the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees that outlined the rights of those who are granted asylum. Until the 1990s, Italy recognized the refugee status exclusively to Europeans, and therefore was not a destination country for most asylum seekers. Italy joined the Dublin Regulation in 1990, and this European common policy to recognize international asylum seekers came into force in 1997.⁸³ Although Italy is a natural destination for migrants from its former colonies – the phrase 'we are here because they were there' reminds Italy of its historical, economic and social ties with its former colonies – most refugees consider Italy a country of transit for several reasons, including its controversial implementation of laws on refugee rights. From 1997 to 2008, refugees could only submit a request for refugee status at Italy's frontiers: once they entered the country, they were precluded this right.⁸⁴ The Bossi-Fini Law introduced a simplified procedure to submit an asylum request and almost 700,000 obtained this status.⁸⁵ However, almost 20,000 of these people left Italy, because the administrative order recognizing their status was made executive only in 2005.

80 Giuseppe Campesi, 'L'Italia e il controllo delle frontiere marittime (1996–2016)', in Mario Savino, ed., *La crisi migratoria tra Italia e Europa* (Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica, 2016), 205–248.

81 Antonio Maria Morone, 'Il processo di Khartoum: l'Italia e l'Europa contro le migrazioni', *ISPI Analysis*, 286 (2015), 1–7.

82 Vassallo Paleologo, *Diritti Sotto Sequestro*, 137–148.

83 Hein, 'Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia', 37.

84 Hein, 'Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia', 54–55.

85 Hein, 'Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia', 70.

In 1992, one year after the fall of Siyad Barre's regime in Somalia, the Italian government adopted an emergency measure and gave residence permits to all Somalis who requested them.⁸⁶ In 1999, this administrative order was cancelled, invalidating all Somali passports released after 1991. This retroactive decision condemned most Somalis in Italy to a clandestine life, with no possibility to go back to a country destroyed by the civil war. Moreover, 'Somalis that could have had the right to enter Italy (for family, work, study or other reasons) could not obtain a visa, because they could not demonstrate their identity'.⁸⁷ In 2000, a law that allowed Somalis to have family reunifications was passed but most had already left Italy. In 2007, the introduction of subsidiary protection status was granted to those who were escaping from war and it recognized the legal rights of Somalis, although it was unable to provide appropriate welcoming places for refugees.

Eritrean refugees come from a 'totalitarian and repressive regime',⁸⁸ where the parliament was dismissed in 2002, religious minorities are discriminated against, and freedom of expression and association are denied.⁸⁹ The regime was condemned by the countries of the African Union and the United Nations Security Council with resolution n.1907 of 23 December 2009, which set an embargo on Eritrea.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Eritrea is considered to be a partner of the European Union in order to stop immigration. After the tragedy of 3 October 2013, where eight Ethiopian and 360 Eritrean citizens who were escaping from Issayas Afewerki's dictatorship died in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach Lampedusa, Italy invited an Eritrean governmental delegation to the funerals, provoking the protests of Eritrean and Italian activists. Eritrean refugees who have obtained refugee status in Italy must go to the Eritrean embassy – an

86 Clara Fringuelli, 'Le infinite emergenze del Corno d'Africa', in Christopher Hein, ed., *Rifugiati: Vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 116.

87 Fringuelli, 'Le infinite emergenze del Corno d'Africa', 116.

88 Hein, 'Storia del diritto di asilo in Italia', 82.

89 Fringuelli, 'Le infinite emergenze del Corno d'Africa', 120.

90 Clara Fringuelli, 'Il dramma del popolo eritreo. Intervista a una rifugiata eritrea', in Christopher Hein, ed., *Rifugiati: Vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 187.

institution led by the government they are escaping from – in order to get the permit required to travel in the European Union.⁹¹ During its semester of the presidency of the European Union in 2014, Italy launched the Khartoum process, a collaboration between countries of the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia) and transit countries (Egypt, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Tunisia) which aimed to stop illegal immigration. Under this scheme, European cooperation will provide 312 million euros – 2.5 million euros of which will come from Italy – to Eritrea until 2020 in order to reduce emigration.⁹² According to Antonio Maria Morone, ‘to cooperate with countries like Sudan and Eritrea in order to control migrations means to participate in politics that are responsible for infringing human rights and the exercise of democratic rights’.⁹³

The effect of the tragedy of 3 October 2013 was the beginning of the naval and air operation called ‘Mare Nostrum’ from 18 October 2013 to 31 October 2014, which involved the Italian Navy patrolling the coast of Libya. Although this operation was presented as humanitarian, Campesi argues that its main scope was securitarian.⁹⁴ The budget and mandate of the search and rescue operations across the Mediterranean Sea was reduced in the subsequent operation called ‘Triton’, which started on 1 November 2014. According to the International Organization for Migration, deaths at sea have risen nine times after the end of Mare Nostrum.⁹⁵ The April 2015 Libya migrant shipwrecks – one of the deadliest maritime tragedies of the twenty-first century, which resulted in over 1,000 deaths alone – is the symbol of the failure of operation Triton, if its goal was to avoid the humanitarian tragedy that is currently happening in the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, more than a hundred European non-governmental organizations criticized the EU’s policies in a document signed on 28 and 29 June 2016,

91 Fringuelli, ‘Il dramma del popolo eritreo’, 188.

92 Morone, ‘Il processo di Khartoum’, 6.

93 Morone, ‘Il processo di Khartoum’, 6–7.

94 Campesi, *Polizia della frontiera*, 183.

95 Antonio Denti, ‘Hundreds Drown off Libya, EU Leaders Forced to Reconsider Migrant Crisis’, *reuters.com* <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-idUSKBN0NA07020150419>> (accessed 4 August 2017).

claiming that such policies aimed mostly to contain immigration rather than to save human lives.⁹⁶

The ambivalent post-national yet national status of each member of the European Union allows them to pass the bucket respectively to the national parliament and Frontex – the European agency established in 2004 to manage the cooperation between national border guards in order to secure EU’s frontiers – when it comes to taking responsibility of issues of immigration.⁹⁷ The presentation of migrants both as voiceless victims who have to be saved or potential enemies mirrors the representation of colonized subjects as threatening and uncivilized presences, who need to be redeemed or exterminated. While Frontex often presents itself as a humanitarian organization that aims to save migrants its actual role is to secure the European borderscape. Moreover, Frontex is a powerful communication agency, which employs rescuing and push-backs, welcoming and identification/expulsion, humanitarian and securitarian operations frequently as synonyms, thus sweetening the language used to describe European security measures.⁹⁸

Although many norms, laws and regulations have changed, it seems that migration is increasingly compared to and treated as a crime, thus violating fundamental rights of migrants. For instance, the Italian plan for security (Law 94/2009) introduced the crime of clandestinity. This law punished or penalized the status of migrants rather than the actions they committed before it was repealed in 2014 by the Justice Committee of the Italian Senate because it went against Art. 10 of the Italian Constitution, which was quoted at the beginning of this section.⁹⁹ However, this law was abolished only in January 2017. The 2016 policies enacted by the European Union are more interested in limiting the entry of migrants into the European Union rather than respecting the rights of refugees and

96 The full text of the letter is available at the following address: <http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2016-06-28-Final_joint_NGO_statement_with_signatories_124.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2017).

97 Campesi, *Polizia della frontiera*, 115.

98 Campesi, *Polizia della frontiera*, 193.

99 Calamai, ‘Una riflessione geopolitica’, 29.

asylum seekers,¹⁰⁰ and they are based on the 'controversial idea that Europe can be saved only by strengthening its police powers, not just by expanding its ability to welcome and protect the rights of asylum seekers refugees'.¹⁰¹

The ambiguities of the rights of refugees who enter Italy might be summarized in Hannah Arendt's words. Arendt argues that the refugee's 'privileges in some cases, injustice in most, blessings and doom are meted out to them according to accident and without any relation whatsoever to what they do, did, or may do'.¹⁰² Arendt also maintains that 'the loss of home and political status become identical with expulsion from humanity altogether' when it comes to refugee rights in a world still divided into nations.¹⁰³ Immigration laws not only exclude migrants from geographical borders, but they cut them off from the very notion of personhood, causing great concern about the respect of human rights by the members of the European Union.

Encounters

The general historical framework outlined so far is important to situate the key cultural topics discussed in this multidisciplinary volume about the colonial, postcolonial and transnational encounters between Italy and its former colonies in the Horn of Africa. The text is divided into three closely interrelated sections called Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Transnationalism. Although only the third section of this volume is called 'transnationalism', the entire book aims to put into question the idea that

¹⁰⁰ Morgese, 'Recenti iniziative dell'Unione europea per affrontare la crisi dei rifugiati', 47.

¹⁰¹ Giuseppe Campesi, 'Genealogia della nuova frontex', *meltingpot.org* <<http://www.meltingpot.org/Genealogia-della-nuova-Frontex.html#.WDLisKlrJXg>> (accessed 3 May 2017).

¹⁰² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego; New York; London: Harvest, 1976), 296.

¹⁰³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.

the colonial and postcolonial encounter between the Horn of Africa and Italy might be understood exclusively by looking at these two geographic areas. This volume also demonstrates that transnational insights on the cultural and political trajectory of Italian colonialism in Africa and its aftermath could contribute to a more articulated scenario.

The first section focuses on three key concepts that characterize the colonial period: the legal justification for colonial inequality, the narration of landscape in Italian literature, and the invention of traditions and the construction of the past in the colonies. Chapter 1 – Law – focuses on the debate over creating differential laws in the colonies since the very beginning of Italian colonialism. The imperialistic ideas of the late nineteenth century went hand-in-hand with the myth of progress as well as with traditional European liberal culture. According to the assimilationist ideology, the principal aim of colonialism was to spread European civilization and to transform indigenous peoples into 'citizens' by imposing upon them the same legislation in force in the metropole. Despite the cultural influence of such an idea, the imperial powers of the late nineteenth century largely established rights to be recognized to colonial peoples on a case-by-case basis. Although Italy located its colonial mission within the expansion of 'superior' European law (founded on Roman law) across the colonies, white citizens living in the colonies and those colonies' indigenous peoples were subjected to different legal systems, according to the racial features and the degree of 'civilization' that Italian legislators and policy makers decreed colonized peoples possessed.

Drawing on critical analysis of how colonial discourse has as one of its objectives the production of imaginative geographies, Chapter 2 – Landscape – analyses accounts and diaries written by Italian travellers and explorers during their stay in Somalia. These include Cesare Maria de Vecchi's *Orizzonti d'Impero* [Horizons of Empire] (1936), Bernardo Vecchi's *Vecchio Benadir* [Old Benadir] (1930), Vittorio Zammarano's *Hic sunt leones. Un anno di esplorazione e di caccia in Somalia* [Hic Sunt Leones: A Year of Exploration and Hunting in Somalia] (1930), and Giuseppe Zucca's *Il paese di madreperla. Sette mesi in Somalia* [A Country of Pearl Oyster: Seven Months in Somalia] (1926). The analysis highlights visual strategies that were employed to justify the colonial enterprise, by

presenting the Somali landscape as 'empty' or 'uninhabited', connecting its limitless spaces to its senseless nature. While colonized subjects are represented as part of that natural landscape, colonizers are presented as those who are destined to find a meaning in and a use of those lands. In order to obtain this rhetorical effect, African traces and interventions on their own land were minimized or were portrayed as irrational, and therefore potentially damaging. The last strategy in the process of transforming the native landscape into a colonial landscape was that of *Italianization*. Writers emphasized the resemblances between the exotic territory and the motherland, as if this land was inherently related to European dominance.

Chapter 3 – History – explores how the Italian Fascist administration in Somalia (1923–1941) envisioned its imperial mission and sought to construct both a past and a future for its colony which conformed to that vision. It considers two colonial projects – the creation of a cultural museum, and the collection of ethnographic and oral data from the frontier regions of Ethiopia – which illustrate the fascists' view of Somalia's role in their larger 'civilizing mission'. The consequences of their imperial efforts continued long after the fall of the Italian East African Empire with the Somali quest for a 'Greater Somalia' and with the ambivalent legacies of colonial cultural preservation.

The examination of the colonial legacy and memory in Chapter 3 initiate the analysis of the postcolonial period and of the selective memory of colonialism in Italy and its former colonies. The presence of reflections about the colonial legacy in different sections of the volume shows the connections between chapters throughout the book. In particular, the analysis focuses on debates about modernization, nationalism, colonialism and its legacy in Ethiopia and on the AFIS, a crucial experience to understand Italy's post-Second World War construction of race and belonging.

A reflection about colonial spatiality is present in Chapter 4 – Urbanism. This chapter explores the history of Italy's urban colonialism in Ethiopia with a particular focus on Addis Ababa, the capital of Italian East Africa (1936–1941). It traces the occupation of Ethiopia, the colonization of its capital, and the crisis of colonial urban remaking.

At the centre of this crisis lies fundamental disparities between Italy's modernist plans and planning practices on the one hand and pre-existing 'traditional' conceptions of spatial organization on the other. A colonial vision encountered a reality in the 'colony' that subverted its implementation and undermined its efficacy. The analysis interrogates the legacy of Italian colonialism but also the memory and history of the colonial encounter, which is complex, fractured, and evolving. The remembering and forgetting of this crucial, albeit brief, experience of foreign occupation is as much about the past as it is about the present. This experience has been contested and redefined by Ethiopia's changing political dynamics, especially since the early 1990s.

Chapter 5 – Nationalism – analyses the impact of the Italian occupation on the political thought of Amharic-language intellectuals close to the centre of the Ethiopian state regarding *zāmānawinnāt* [modernization]. Almost all Ethiopian intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century seemed to believe that their country's glorious cultural, religious, and political tradition made it possible to find a uniquely Ethiopian path to modernization, through which to obtain European-like levels of economic and social welfare. This progress would have to be achieved by carefully adopting certain valuable elements of Western society while preserving some traditional ones, thus creating a hybrid political model. By analysing Amharic plays and novels, the chapter investigates to what extent the Italian occupation put into discussion the state-sponsored 'grand narrative' of Ethiopia's future glories, and to what extent Amharic-language intellectuals rethought their involvement in the state's modernizing project.

Chapter 6 – Racism – focuses on oral memories and testimonies of several Italian Somalis, or *meticci* (sing. *meticcio*), who were born in Mogadishu in the 1940s and the 1950s, and then had to migrate to Italy during the early 1960s. At the beginning of the 1960s, most Italian Somalis found themselves in a limbo. On one hand, they were completely marginalized and discriminated against in the new postcolonial Somali society. On the other hand, once they decided to migrate to Italy they experienced a similar discrimination by Italians, but for different reasons. The sources also indicate that the history of Italian Somalis was not just the product

of political choices, but was also determined by the will and decisions of Italian Somalis themselves. Too Italian to stay in Somalia, and too African to stay in Italy, the status of many Italian Somali in Italy was complicated because they were stateless people. After the Somali independence in 1960, *meticci* shared a similar relegation to that experienced by former Italian settlers because of their Italian education and Italian half-origin, although they lacked the social privileges and legal status of Italian citizens. The case of Italian Somali *meticci* thus reveals not only racism in postcolonial Italy, but also in postcolonial Somalia, based on the same idea of nationhood as not determined by place of birth but by having one or both parents who are citizens of the state. In both countries, being Italian Somali was linked more to an idea of racial identity than to the synthesis of different cultures.

Chapter 7 – Decolonization – discusses the relations between former colonizers and colonized countries after decolonization during the AFIS period. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section analyses a celebratory documentary of this period – Antonio Nediani's *Somalia: dieci anni dopo* [Somalia: Ten Years Later] (1960) – which adopted a nostalgic and paternalistic tone to describe the values and advantages of the Italian administration. The second section analyses Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana Nera* [Black Week] (1961), which Giorgio Moser adapted in a 1963 movie, *Violenza Segreta* [Secret Violence]. Although these cultural products were aimed at criticizing colonialism, they employed the same themes and tropes of colonial narratives, especially in the representation of Somali women. Finally, Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed's *Timira. Romanzo meticcio* [Timira. A *meticcio* novel] (2012), and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Clouds over the Equator* (2017) – originally published in Italian with the title *Nuvole sull'Equatore. Gli italiani dimenticati. Una storia* (2010) – are analysed. These novels place the AFIS administration at the centre rather than at the margins of Italian history, therefore showing that segregation and racism not only permeate colonial culture but are also present in postcolonial Italian history.

Transnationalism – the global movement of people, products, and ideas 'notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and the

laws, regulations, and national narratives they represent)¹⁰⁴ – is a running underlying theme of the volume. Indeed, one of the novels analysed in Chapter 7 – Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Clouds over the Equator* – was written by a writer of Somali and Pakistani origins who moved to Italy and then to Birmingham, in the United Kingdom. In Birmingham, she translated *Nuvole sull'Equatore* and her first novel – *Lontano da Mogadiscio* [Far from Mogadishu] (1994) – in English,¹⁰⁵ and continued her activity as a poet and a writer in this language.¹⁰⁶ The third and last section of the volume has a specific focus on the transnational dimension of the encounter between Italy and its former colonies in the Horn of Africa.

Chapter 8 – Heroes – analyses the literary representation or lack thereof of the Somali anticolonial leader 'Sayyid' Mohammed Abdulle Hassan (1856–1920) in British and Italian literature, Somali oral culture, and transnational literature in English, such as the novels by Nuruddin Farah. The goal of this analysis is to reconsider the history of anti-Italian resistance in Somalia from a fully transnational perspective, as previously suggested in the case of the Adwa battle (1896) within the global history of pan-African movements. Finally, the cultural and political perspectives on the figure of 'Sayyid', both in the Italian and the transnational debate, are compared with the memory of the anticolonial religious leader Omar Mukhtar (1861–1931) in Libya. The chapter shows the different legacies of anticolonialism in former Italian colonies, either interpreted as the combination of political and religious struggles or the memory of gendered resistance to colonialism.

Chapter 9 – Diaspora – analyses why the directions of contemporary Eritrean migration do not reversely overlap with the directions of historical colonization waves. This is an exception in the migration trajectories from colonized to colonizer countries. Drawing from ethnographic

104 Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3. Regarding the 'transnational turn' in 'Italian' studies, see Emma Bond, 'Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?', *Italian Studies*, 69.3 (2014), 415–424.

105 Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio/Far from Mogadishu* (Milan: Laurana, 2013).

106 Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Wings* (United Kingdom: Createspace, 2017).

fieldwork in Italy as well as in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan, this chapter explores the interaction of different factors in shaping the Eritreans' migration trajectories. Combining ethnographic insights with a close examination of the history of Eritrean migration to Italy from the 1950s onwards, this chapter aims at a better understanding of the reasons behind this Italian exception and their implications for migration and postcolonial studies. The postcolonial encounters between Italy and its former colonies – and in particular of Eritrean migration to Europe – are due to factors such as family expectations and welfare inequalities, rather than colonial ties.

Chapter 10 – Sport – focuses on two aspects of postcolonial sport cultures regarding Italy and its former colonies: the politics of inclusion and exclusion in football and the politics of representation of Olympic athletes. Analysing football as a privileged field for identity struggles, the chapter first explores the link between nationalism and exclusion, which is often stained by the memory of racial discrimination. The chapter considers how Italian players and trainers have been accepted in former colonies, and it traces how transnational migrations have changed the idea of national identity in Italian football. The second section of the chapter focuses on the ways in which Saamiya Yusuf Omar – a Somali athlete who participated in the Beijing Olympics of 2006 and lost her life in the Mediterranean Sea in 2012 while she was trying to reach Lampedusa by boat – has been represented in Reinhard Kleist's graphic novel *Der Traum von Olympia. Die Geschichte von Samia Yusuf Omar* [An Olympic Dream: The Story of Samia Yusuf Omar] (2015) and Giuseppe Catozzella's *Non dirmi che hai paura* [Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid] (2014). The chapter not only compares the point of view through which the same story is narrated, it shows that the 'true' description of sport events – both authors claim to have based the story narrated on the testimony of Samia's sister, Hodan – might reiterate 'imagined' portrayals of Muslim subjects coming from former Italian colonies.

Chapter 11 – Photography – explores the use of primary photographic sources in narratives dealing with the Italian colonial era in the Horn of Africa by three women authors connected to the Horn of Africa diaspora: Nadifa Mohamed (who was born in Somaliland and brought

up in the United Kingdom), Maaza Mengiste (an Ethiopian-American writer now based in New York), and Igiaba Scego (born to Somali parents in Rome and raised in Italy). The chapter engages with various theories of the construction of difference in colonial photographs, as well as those emphasizing the importance of the gaze and of the physicality of images themselves, in order to argue for a re-evaluation of the role of photographs as inter-text in recent works by the three authors. The chapter shows how postcolonial descriptions of pictures reverse the colonial gaze and contribute to the active construction of a link between past and present, transforming looking into a process of waiting, imagining, and remembering that allows for affect.

Although the three sections of this book seem to suggest a loosely chronological approach to the volume, a disciplinary reading can be traced between the chapters that privilege the analysis of first-hand sources (Diaspora, History, Law, Racism, Urbanism) or the representation of historical events (Decolonization, Heroes, Landscape, Nationalism, Photography, Sport). Moreover, it is also possible to read this volume by considering the geographic area that each author focuses on, which can either privilege an Italian/European (Decolonization, Law, Landscape, Sport), an African (History, Racism, Nationalism, Urbanism) or a diasporic (Diaspora, Heroes, Photography) perspective. These three ways of reading the volume demonstrate the interdependency and connection between the chapters of this study and the analysis of common themes – such as race, discrimination, issues of representation and self-representation, and the legacy and memory of colonialism – from different perspectives in different chapters. Given that one of the main objectives of this volume is to shed light on issues of urgency and relevance to the understanding of contemporary Eritrean, Ethiopian, Italian, and Somali cultures – such as migration, colonialism, colonial legacy, multiculturalism, and discrimination – this study aims to open up new possibilities for comparative research and critical synergies in Italian studies, African studies, and beyond.

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PART I

Colonialism

OLINDO DE NAPOLI

I Law: The Myth of Progress and Differentialism in the Liberal Age

Aldobrandino Malvezzi's 1933 book about indigenous politics in the colonies employed the 'truth hidden in the well' metaphor to demonstrate that colonialism created contradictory legal systems and uncertain policies:

Truth always ends up emerging from the well in all its radiant nudity however much hypocrites strive in vain to throw clothes on her that do not fit her in order to avoid offending vulgar decency. Something like this has happened in native politics in the colonies. [...] All this is evidenced by the uncertainties, contradictory measures and empirical methods with which the indigenous problem has so far been dealt with in Europe.¹

This passage refers to a famous iconographic motif in late nineteenth-century French paintings such as Jean Léon Gerome's *La Vérité sortant du puits armée de son martinet pour châtier l'humanité* [Truth Coming Out of Her Well, Armed with Her Martinet to Chastize Mankind] (1896; Figure 1.1), which was used as an allegory for the Dreyfus affair, a scandal in which a Jewish French army officer Alfred Dreyfus was falsely convicted of passing military secrets to Germany. Malvezzi employed this allegory to point out that contradictory legal systems and uncertain policies were still features of colonial politics in the 1930s. In other words, he believed that regulating the colonial power-native subject relationship was a core colonial issue. Malvezzi aimed to unravel the persistent uncertainty of

1 Aldobrandino Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie* (Padua: Cedam, 1933), 27–28.

Italian imperialism's colonial background, by bringing his truth out of the well.

This critique notwithstanding, after demonstrating wide-ranging knowledge of colonial problems, the author came up with no specific approaches or solutions but reiterated his generic hope for benevolent colonialism based on cooperation between different civilizations rather than pure subjugation. Malvezzi nurtured the illusion that colonialism could generate a pacific meeting of different civilizations rather than the brutal assimilation of natives into 'superior' civilizations which he saw as a form of violence:

What is this immoderate love of uniformity if not an attempt to create a comfortable situation in which everything can be adjusted with the least effort by simply activating a single lever? [...] Europe has long inclined toward a sole, constantly and systematically pursued purpose, namely to extend a single type of civilization, European civilization, to the whole world.²

His hopes were soon dashed: shortly afterwards aggressive fascist expansionism would lead to war with Ethiopia, as well as a totalitarian turn imbued with contempt for the 'inferior races' of Africa. After all, the brutal *pacification* of Libya (or, rather, the brutal repression of 'rebels') had already shown that fascism did not exactly represent Malvezzi's ideas of colonization.

This chapter analyses the legal discourse on models of colonial politics which took place in Italy during the liberal age. With remarkable constancy, Italian jurists opposed applying the laws and principles valid in Italy to the colonies, right from the start of the colonial enterprise. While Italian colonial propaganda presented the creation of an alternative legal system in the colonies as a way of respecting local traditions, this analysis shows that this practice was employed to discriminate against native peoples who were considered inferior races. To put it in Malvezzi's words, this chapter aims to uncover the 'naked truth' hidden within the anti-assimilationist discourse at the core of Italian colonialism's legal ideology.

2 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 35.

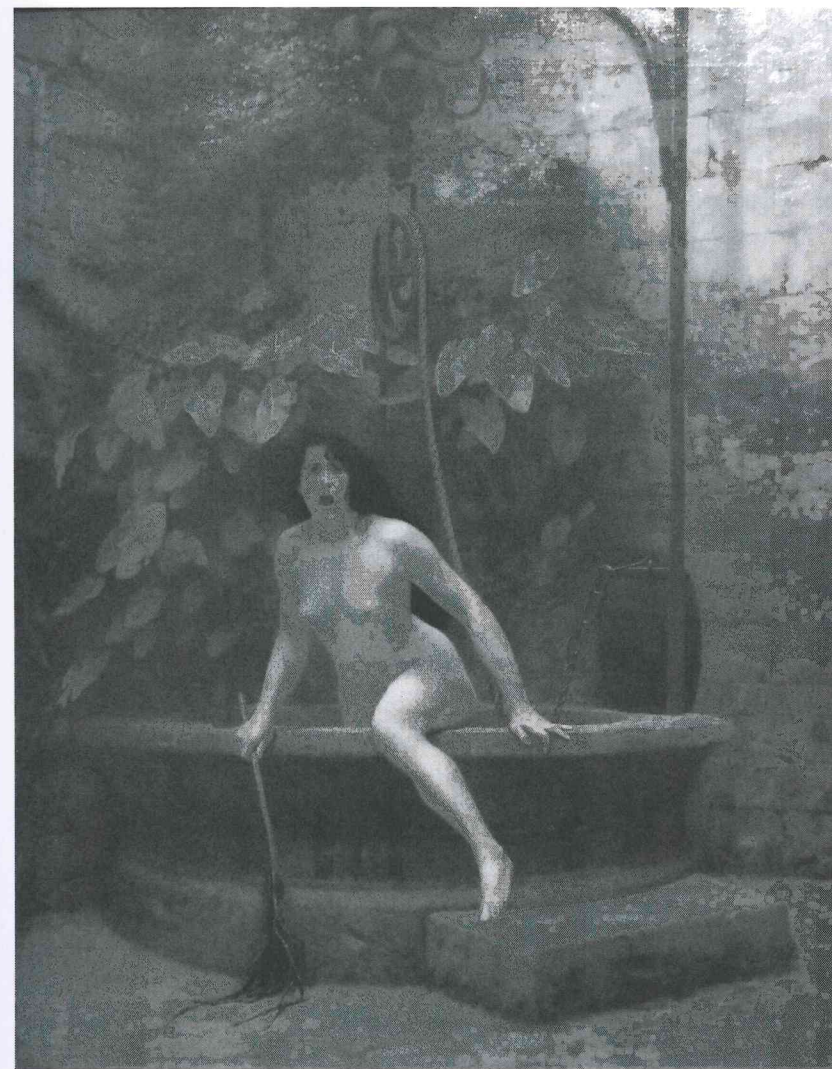


Figure 1.1: Jean Léon Gerome's *La Vérité sortant du puits armée de son martinet pour châtier l'humanité* (1896).

Less School and More Life: An Uncertain Law for 'Inferior Subjects'

When Italy began its colonial enterprise, international law was subject to remarkable changes. Until the first half of the century legal theories had presented European states as equal and independent and relationships between them as organized according to contractual rules. In the second half of the nineteenth century such theories were considered useless in the struggle for progress and the dissemination of reforms, because interpreting states as self-sufficient subjects was no longer considered satisfactory in accordance with a new *esprit d'internationalité* [spirit of internationalism].³ At the same time legal ideologies began legitimizing colonialism in scientific terms. Positivism reinforced the distinction between civilized and uncivilized peoples although traditional religious based distinctions remained a fundamental tool in the organization of international relationships.⁴ In other words, late nineteenth-century imperialistic currents moved hand-in-hand with traditional liberal culture and progressive ideas.⁵ One element in liberal culture proposed a historical narrative based on an idea of progress which legitimized colonial expansion. Nevertheless, this kind of legitimization did not entail European law being automatically extended to colonized countries.

In its approach to colonialism, Italian legal culture must be understood within this context. Colonialism was seen as an opportunity to

3 Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations. The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

4 Luigi Nuzzo, *Origini di una scienza: diritto internazionale e colonialismo nel 19° secolo* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2012).

5 Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'Liberalism and Empire in Nineteenth-Century International Law', *American Historical Review* 117.1 (2012), 122–140; Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Liberal imperialism in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

promote the expansion of Western sovereignty in Africa,⁶ but a series of considerations led to caution in extending European laws and citizenship to the inhabitants of newly acquired lands. The Napoleonic model, which consisted of taking the Code throughout Europe where it was to serve as a model to European legislators, was perceived as unsuitable for the colonies whose peoples were considered inferior races and most lawyers thought that extending metropolitan laws without adapting them in any way was impractical.⁷

While extending Italian law to colonial subjects was ruled out, a systematic set of legal principles for the colonies could not be drawn up either. Colonial law experts underlined this concept up until the fascist era, when incessant propaganda reiterated the superiority of fascist imperialism and its legal measures over weak liberal colonialism. Lawyer Arnaldo Bertola, former president of the court in Rhodes, condemned a significant absence of colonial legal principle development in Italian legal culture at the third conference of colonial studies in 1937.⁸ For Luciano Martone, constructing a valid theory of colonial law was impossible because 'it was basically inconsistent to elaborate a systematic doctrine for a subject that allowed only for descriptive procedure'.⁹

In fact, colonial law was mainly an on-site task by men on the spot – judges and officers – who tried to build a corpus of rules applicable to colonial subjects, peoples invariably described as inferior in racial or civilization terms. Their otherness justified both the special nature of colonial law and its pragmatic approach to norm generation which was to be practically derived rather than dogmatically constructed. As a result, colonial law lacked consistency (what jurists call dogmatic construction) and originated

6 Pietro Costa, 'Il fardello della civilizzazione: Metamorfosi della sovranità nella gius-colonialistica italiana', *Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico* 33–34 (2004–2005), 169–257.

7 Martone, *Diritto d'Oltremare: legge e ordine per le colonie del Regno d'Italia* (Milan: Giuffrè, 2008), 1–9.

8 Arnaldo Bertola, 'Gli studi giuridici coloniali e la loro importanza nel presente', in *Atti del III Congresso di Studi Coloniali* (Florence: Sansoni, 1937), 7.

9 Martone, *Diritto d'Oltremare*, 38.

from the so-called rules of thumb 'generated by the routine collisions and alliances of colonial policies'.¹⁰

A preference for non-theoretical law persisted even when, in the early years of the twentieth century, jurists shifted towards creating special colonial legal codes. For instance, judge Ranieri Falcone's report on the proposed Criminal Code noted that it featured 'less procedure and more rapidity, less school and more life'.¹¹ Such codes were never officially valid but had a remarkable influence on colonial justice nonetheless.¹² The failure of such projects meant that criminal law was no longer seen as a tool for the transformation of colonial society.¹³ Much later, within the fascist legislative context, judge Adalgiso Ravizza pointed out that even where the extending Italian law was envisaged 'examining whether our law can be fully applied to the colonies is to be delegated to careful judicial interpretation'.¹⁴ In other words, colonial states needed to take into account that colonized people were radically different from Europeans in terms of race, culture and sensibility. Consequently, European norms could be highly detrimental when applied to them. For Luigi Nuzzo this was the fundamental choice distinction behind Italian colonialism from the start.¹⁵

Historians such as Luciano Martone and Luigi Nuzzo described colonies as spaces in which the usual legal guarantees were suspended,¹⁶ or – to

10 Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 143.

11 Camera dei Deputati, *Atti parlamentari, Legislatura XXIII, sessione 1909–1913, Allegati alla Relazione Martini*, Doc. 62, vol. 2, Attachment no. 29, 570.

12 Maria L. Sagù, 'Sui tentativi di codificazione della colonia Eritrea', *Clio*, 22 (1986), 567–616.

13 Luciano Martone, 'Le novità dell'azione penale nella colonia Eritrea all'inizio del Novecento', in Aldo Mazzacane, ed., *Oltremare. Diritto e istituzioni dal colonialismo all'età postcoloniale* (Naples: Cuen, 2006), 255–265.

14 Adalgiso Ravizza, 'Aspetti della giurisprudenza coloniale italiana', in *Atti del Primo Congresso di Studi Coloniali*, vol. 5 (Florence: Giuntina, 1931), 207.

15 Luigi Nuzzo, 'La colonia come eccezione. Un'ipotesi di transfer', *Rechtsgeschichte*, 8 (2006), 52–58.

16 Martone, *Diritto d'Oltremare*, 1–9; Nuzzo, 'La colonia come eccezione'.

use Giorgio Agamben's terminology – a 'state of exception'.¹⁷ This legitimized pragmatic law, namely a legal system that is not based upon principles, but derives from experience, because – as Malvezzi stated – 'colonial legislation and system, colonial law and doctrinaire theory, are antithetical terms'.¹⁸ Furthermore, the adoption of this legal system signals the return to pre-modern institutions.¹⁹ Indeed, Gennaro Mondaini – a colonial scholar whose later stance was close to the fascist regime²⁰ – wrote in 1907:

The historical development of colonial law in practice, if not always in theory, constantly shows the triumph of principles that have now vanished from European law. [...] The ethics of colonial expansion are [...] inferior to the civilization of colonized peoples: colonization's practical methods consistently pursue atavistic regression, an involution of such peoples.²¹

It should be noted that Mondaini was an exponent of colonialism and his words were not, therefore, designed to criticize colonizers but simply to describe the policies adopted. Interestingly, Mondaini's words echoed the effective statements by British historian and jurist Henry Sumner Maine on the subject of the difficult task of the colonial ruler in India: 'the British rulers of India are like men bound to make their watches keep true time in two longitudes at once. Nevertheless, the paradoxical position must be accepted. If they are too slow, there will be no improvement. If they are too fast, there will be no security'.²² This passage shows the conviction that a two-fold time frame existed which put civilized Europeans on one side

17 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

18 Aldobrandino Malvezzi, *Elementi di diritto coloniale* (Padua: Cedam, 1928), 18.

19 Martone, *Diritto d'Oltremare*, 3.

20 Mirco Carrattieri, 'Mondaini, Gennaro', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 75 (Rome: Treccani, 2011), 595–599.

21 Gennaro Mondaini, 'Il carattere di eccezionalità nella storia del diritto coloniale e le nuove forme giuridiche di espansione territoriale nelle colonie', *Rivista coloniale*, 28.2 (1907), 7, 30.

22 Henry S. Maine, *The Effects of Observation of India on Modern European Thought* (London: John Murray, 1875), 87.

and 'child-like' and 'backward' colonized people on the other.²³ Colonial rulers had also to be synchronized with this two-fold time frame. In this regard, the first civil governor of Eritrea, Ferdinando Martini, a man of letters who had initially opposed colonial enterprise but later converted to colonialism, in 1897 explicitly maintained that 'one should always bear in mind that here we are in the middle ages'.²⁴

The result was a differentiated legal system: in the same colonial space, different laws were applied to natives and Europeans respectively. In other words, colonizers needed to create not only a separate law for the colonies but also a separate law for native peoples within it. The principle of special laws for the colonies was commonplace in colonial contexts but Italy advocated separate criminal system for Italian citizens and colonial subjects respectively, while other colonial powers drew up special laws valid for the whole of a colony's inhabitants.²⁵

Civilizing Mission, *Esprit d'Internationalité*, and the Progress Myth

The Italian colonial mission was partly the result of an inferiority complex in the Italian elite: in the early 1880s, of the most important European powers, only Italy and Germany – late-comers in the unification process – were lacking colonial possessions. The scramble for Africa was an occasion for redemption, a chance to win a 'place in the sun' suitable to Italy's great power self-image. It is not surprising that this search for prestige came to fruition under left-wing governments and thus, at least at the outset, within

23 Chiara Giorgi, *L'Africa come carriera. Funzioni e funzionari del colonialismo italiano* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), 27.

24 Ferdinando Martini, *Il Diario Eritreo*, vol. 1 (Florence: Vallecchi, 1947), 122.

25 Sagù, 'Sui tentativi di codificazione della colonia Eritrea', 576.

a progressive juridical discourse.²⁶ The age of aggressive nationalism and colonial expansion paradoxically coincided with the culmination of the espousal of a progress based international law and the struggle for reform within national states.

Since the 1880s the Italian legal colonialist discourse had been proclaiming its adhesion to these progressive values because it was felt to be impossible to turn down this 'generous race' of all the great powers of Europe,²⁷ as celebrated jurist and Minister for foreign affairs Pasquale S. Mancini declared before the Chamber of Deputies. In 1885, Enrico Catellani – one of the foremost international legal experts of the day – wrote that Italian expansion was a 'gentle, benevolent, quasi-educational mission'.²⁸ In this passage Catellani argued for an Italian version of the new concept of international law as a 'gentle civilizer of nations' which the Institut de Droit International and its intellectual milieu were then advocating.²⁹ In fact, progressive values accompanied the birth of Italian colonial politics, often to the perplexity of the conservatives sitting in Parliament.³⁰

Mancini attempted to clarify his intentions when he defined the inhabitants of the newly acquired African lands as 'new citizens' of Italy and indicated that colony should be seen as integral part of the kingdom.³¹ Extending Italian rights to the colonies thus seemed to be the legal basis for colonial expansion from an assimilationist perspective. For instance, as new Italian citizens the Eritrean people were to enjoy a series of rights, such as the right to travel in Italy. However, colonized people were never

26 Olindo De Napoli, 'Tra progresso del diritto e turn to empire. Il percorso dei giuristi italiani di fronte al colonialismo da Mancini all'età giolittiana', *Italia contemporanea*, 274 (2014), 7–41.

27 Speech by Mancini, *Atti del Parlamento italiano, Discussioni*, vol. 4 (1887), p. 4295.

28 Enrico Catellani, *Le colonie e la conferenza di Berlino* (Turin: Utet, 1885), 497.

29 Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations. The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960*, 11–96.

30 Fulvio Cammarano, 'La questione coloniale alla Camera', in Pier Luigi Ballini and Paolo Pecorari, eds, *Alla ricerca delle colonie (1876–1896)* (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, arti e lettere, 2007), 187–273.

31 Pasquale S. Mancini, *Discorsi parlamentari di Pasquale Stanislao Mancini*, vol. 7 (Rome: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1896), 143–145.

put on a par with Italian citizens, and the legal category of 'colonial subjecthood' – which mirrored the French category of *sujétion coloniale* – was soon applied to them. No real attempt to equate them with Italians from a legal viewpoint was made and Mancini's words remained a dead letter.³²

During the six years in which Francesco Crispi served as Italy's prime minister (1887–1891; 1893–1896), the civilizing idea gave way to military expansion and finally the colonies were explicitly defined as a 'pertinence' of the kingdom and not part of it. In the twentieth century, jurist Santi Romano came to the same conclusion, arguing that the metropole does not have the same legal status as a colonial territory.³³ However, at the beginning of the colonial enterprise, Mancini believed that encompassing the colonies in the kingdom did not automatically entail extending Italian law. He maintained that the colonial state would recognize the traditional laws of colonized peoples. Yet this needed to be reconciled with the much-vaunted idea of the Italians as bearers of a superior law and a civilizing mission. As Malvezzi explained:

Moderation was required, the pursuit of a means by which it was possible to reconcile ideal ends with the practical necessities of colonial expansion and this was achieved by subordinating the respect for [traditional] customs which Italy was promising to natives on certain expressly stated conditions.³⁴

Therefore, the Law of Assab passed on 5 July 1882 provided for a limitation: indigenous traditions were valid unless they were contrary to 'universal morality and public order'.³⁵ Italians proclaimed that they would respect the colonies' pre-existing legal systems and not extend their own laws *ex abrupto*. The limitation clause used here – respect for universal morality and public order – was the solution adopted in many colonial contexts, particularly where small European minorities lived in contact and somehow

32 De Napoli, 'Tra progresso del diritto e turn to empire. Il percorso dei giuristi italiani di fronte al colonialismo da Mancini all'età giolittiana'.

33 Santi Romano, *Corso di diritto coloniale* (Rome: Athenaeum, 1918), 118–123.

34 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 66.

35 Isabella Rosoni, *La colonia Eritrea. La prima amministrazione coloniale italiana (1880–1912)* (Macerata: Eum, 2006), 113–118.

coexisted with subject peoples. The 'limitation clauses' adopted in various colonial contexts were similar. In 1901, the Royal Decrees (hereafter R.D.) relating to the Gold Coast and Ashanti respectively stated that governors were to issue ordinances to ensure good colonial governance and in so doing were bound to respect indigenous laws 'except so far as the same may be incompatible with the due exercise of H.M.'s power and jurisdiction, or clearly injurious to the welfare of the same natives'.³⁶ The formulas used for South Rhodesia and Uganda, in 1898 and 1902 respectively, were similar. Art. 4 of the *Charte coloniale Belgique* of 18 October 1908 decreed that 'the non-registered indigenous people of the Belgian Congo enjoy the civil rights recognized them by both colonial legislation and their own customs as far as these are not contrary either to the law or public order'. At the end of the 1920s Portugal used a different formula for the natives of Angola and Mozambique: the clause established limitations on individual right to live and freedom, principles of humanity and Portuguese sovereignty.

These were intentionally generic clauses and the result was to accord some discretion to colonial legislators and judges in determining which of the dominated peoples' laws were contrary to 'public order' or 'the spirit of the law' or even the 'principles of freedom'. This paved the way to arbitrary decision making by colonial judges and officers. As Bernard Durand has argued, this kind of clause was designed to prevent the colonies from developing uncivilized practices, specifically slavery and the burning of widows on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands.³⁷ However, it also avoided the mere application of the colonizer's law to the colonies, which would have significantly reduced the discretion of the new rulers. For example, extending Italian legal principles to the colonies would have obliged the Italian government to respect a division of power between the judiciary and administrative bodies, depriving the government itself of its judgement prerogative. Instead, penal sanctions were long dispensed to colonial subjects via administrative procedures.³⁸ The problem was even

36 See *Ashanti Order in Council*, 1901; *Northern Territories Order in Council*, 1901.

37 Bernard Durand, *Introduction historique au droit colonial* (Paris: Economica, 2015), 246–249.

38 Martone, *Diritto d'Oltremare*, 6.

more serious when one considers that Eritrea's colonial administration was a military government for some time.³⁹

It was precisely this arbitrary nature of colonial law that Italian experts wanted to conceal. Colonial law scholars attempted to circumvent identification of the fundamental principles that would have highlighted its arbitrary character, namely that colonial law was largely a matter of legal provisions which had not passed through Parliament together with discretionary decisions.⁴⁰ This differentialist legal system stemmed from the classic liberal imperialist ideology based on a firm belief in European superiority and, at the same time, on a conviction that colonization was required to encourage 'child-people' to progress in evolutionary terms. Legal differentiation was to be temporary, in the expectation that the natives would gradually progress,⁴¹ although any end to colonization was postponed to an unspecified future.⁴² As jurist Attilio Brunialti wrote in 1897:

[The colonies] will gradually develop into states and break away from us, and those peoples whose national geniuses leave a more widespread and lasting mark and succeed in raising around them an array of children, as independent as they want but a tribute to the old trunk from which they came, will be fortunate.⁴³

Differentiation was based on this idea of gradual progress and had two fundamental characteristics: it was both a pragmatic and a contradictory solution.

It was pragmatic because it appeared to leave space for norms developed on a case-by-case basis and the very ambiguity of the public order clause could be interpreted in various ways. For example, debate on whether polygamy was contrary to public order or otherwise was common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Malvezzi was vehemently opposed

39 Nicola Labanca, *In marcia verso Adua* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993).

40 Luciano Martone, 'Il diritto coloniale', in *Il Contributo italiano alla storia del Pensiero – Diritto* (Rome: Treccani, 2012).

41 Olindo De Napoli, 'Race and Empire: The Legitimation of Italian Colonialism in Juridical Thought', *The Journal of Modern History*, 85.4 (2013), 817–818.

42 Rosoni, *La colonia Eritrea*, 47.

43 Attilio Brunialti, *Le colonie degli italiani* (Turin: Utet, 1897), 5.

to the idea of banning it as this would mean imposing values specific to one – European society – to other civilizations. Furthermore, as family frameworks were also a product of economic structure, prohibiting polygamy would, he believed, be counterproductive to social order and eventually to colonizers themselves.⁴⁴ Commenting on the Belgian Colonial Chart law arguing for the progressive abandonment of polygamy, Michel Halewyck explained that the latter was contrary to international public order. However, he also claimed that 'this ancient barbaric institution can be tolerated for a temporary period; however judges will never ever be permitted to recognize the civil effects of a bigamous native's second marriage'.⁴⁵ In short, direct application of European legal principles might potentially have created discrepancies and problems for public order itself. Henry Solus, author of a successful treatise on native peoples under private law, was in general sceptical about the potential for introducing limitation clauses. The generic nature of the public order formula opened the way to excessive application, such as when public order was considered to be based on the principles of French civilization, 'because this will actually mean claiming to impose French civilization as it is on populations that cannot access it, at least now'.⁴⁶ On this issue, Malvezzi himself affirmed: 'behaving like that [...] would mean establishing pure and simple assimilation'.⁴⁷ Pragmatism, thus, required prudence.

A solution based on legal separation between colonizers and colonized people was also a contradictory solution from a legal perspective. Indeed, extending the superior law of civilized people was the basis of colonialism's formal legitimacy and it contrasted starkly with legal differentiation. A differential legal system would crystallize the cultural and anthropological diversity of native peoples under European domination

44 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 56–58.

45 Michel Halewyck, *La charte coloniale: commentaire de la loi du 18 octobre 1908 sur le gouvernement du Congo belge*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: M. Weissenbruch, 1910), 165.

46 Henry Solus, *Traite de la condition des indigenes en droit prive: colonies et pays de protectorat (non compris l'Afrique du nord) et pays sous mandat* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1927), 314.

47 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 71.

more serious when one considers that Eritrea's colonial administration was a military government for some time.³⁹

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42 Rosoni, *La colonia Eritrea*, 47.

43 Attilio Brunialti, *Le colonie degli italiani* (Turin: Utet, 1897), 5.

44 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 56–58.

45 Michel Halewyck, *La charte coloniale: commentaire de la loi du 18 octobre 1908 sur le gouvernement du Congo belge*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: M. Weissenbruch, 1910), 165.

46 Henry Solus, *Traite de la condition des indigenes en droit prive: colonies et pays de protectorat (non compris l'Afrique du nord) et pays sous mandat* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1927), 314.

47 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 71.

rather than contributing to their moral elevation. In this regard, it should be noted that jurists supporting colonialism often emphasized that Italy was the heir to the great Roman law civilizing tradition and that the latter would bring light into Africa's darkness.

Especially after the period in which Mancini was considered the leader of the Italian school of international law, the reference to the Roman historical model was very strong. For instance, in 1886 law philosopher Giovanni Bovio delivered a public speech at the University of Naples in which he praised Roman colonization whilst critically highlighting just how far Italian practice was from this model, affirming:

Superstrong Rome, because the Rome of Law (the weak have no rights to claim or bring) was a long way from this one not only in time but also in soul and intellect. That Rome was master of all parts of the law, even colonial law, a not insignificant part of Roman public law. [...] The colonizing people par excellence, the people that first established the colonial science of law, was the juridical and political people – the Roman people.⁴⁸

The idea that modern Italian law derived from Roman law was the legal science postulated in the wake of state unification from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards.⁴⁹ Thus, exalting the legal civilization and the Roman law mission was one of the main Italian legal themes.

Once the colonial enterprise had begun, it was not easy to explain that for the subjects of those lands the state applied another law, traditional law, usually made up of customary norms. It was indeed based on their primitive laws that colonial subjects had been defined 'barbarians', 'extra-historical races' or, at best, 'child-like' people from time to time. Consequently, jurists questioned whether juridical differentiation implied renouncing the civilizing mission. For instance, Edgar Brookes, a liberal South African senator and professor of History and Political Sciences at the University of Natal, wrote: 'coming back now to the majority – the Natives who remain subject to the Native Law – we naturally ask ourselves: What is the future of Native

48 Giovanni Bovio, *Il diritto pubblico e le razze umane* (Rome: Morano, 1887), 13–14.

49 Aldo Schiavonè, 'Un'identità perduta. La parabola del diritto romano in Italia', in Aldo Schiavonè, ed., *Stato e cultura giuridica in Italia dall'Unità alla Repubblica* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1990), 275–302.

Law? Will it remain stationary, will it ultimately become coincident with European Law, or will it develop into a civilised law?'.⁵⁰ Malvezzi was also aware of this problem, and argued that 'the commitment to respect indigenous traditions and customs was a serious matter because it could appear that Europe was thus renouncing that civilizing mission which has never ceased to represent the reason and moral justification of its domination over other peoples'.⁵¹ This passage shows the importance of the legal differentialism discourse, inviting its contents and implications to be assessed beyond the proclaimed intention of showing 'respect' for other traditions.

The Legal Differentialism Discourse

In 1905 judge Ranieri Falcone presented the order of business that he had prepared for the Colonial Congress of Asmara, and urged his listeners to 'be careful not to follow the assimilation method too much as more than one great nation is still suffering its significant effects'.⁵² Then, after a critical reference to the theories of eighteenth-century French philosophers on the equivalence of all human races, he maintained that such ideas needed to be supplanted with more realistic and practical concepts, by fostering 'gradual legal and educational improvement in an inferior human species'.⁵³ In 1913 Mariano D'Amelio, perhaps the most important of the Italian colonial jurists,⁵⁴ made an insightful comment on the provisions of the

50 Edgar Brookes, *History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to Present Day* (Beperk: Nasionale Pers, 1924), 202.

51 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 66.

52 Carlo Rossetti, ed., *Atti del Congresso Coloniale Italiano in Asmara*, vol. 1 (Rome: Tip. Dell'Unione cooperativa editrice, 1906), 121.

53 Rossetti, 121.

54 Pietro Saraceno, 'La magistratura coloniale italiana 1886–1942', in Pietro Saraceno, ed., *I magistrati italiani dall'unità al fascismo: studi biografici e prosopografici* (Rome: Carocci, 1988), 283–284.

1909 Eritrean civil code which provided that native women acquiring citizenship on marriage to Italian citizens would revert to colonial subject status on widowhood. He asserted that 'in this way, Italy will be immune to the mistake that France is not labouring under, namely [pursuing] the assimilation of colonial subjects with citizens by automatically creating a new French people in its colonies with which it did not subsequently seem happy'.⁵⁵ The brief report of the Commission appointed to draw up the Eritrean civil code also stigmatized French assimilationist policies arguing that they had turned out to be counterproductive,⁵⁶ while several scholars proposed the Italian model as an alternative with its attempts at paternalism in Eritrea.

The choice between differential law and the opposing so-called 'unique justice' model was a choice between general colonial administration models and constituted an important chapter in the Italian legal debate. Such discussions inevitably involved consideration of theories on human races or *stirpi* – a term used to indicate tribal lineage – according to the language often used. Strikingly, Italian jurists unanimously condemned the French model and exalted the British model, which was considered to be inspired by less abstract ideas.

This was the Italian legal opinion for a very long time, basically from the beginning of real colonial thought in the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s. In the nineteenth century praise of the British model was also the result of the Anglophile attitudes typical of the Italian liberals. For example, in the earliest legal debates on the need for colonies, Attilio Brunialti, one of the most important figures of this period, proposed the English model as the best one.⁵⁷ In private memoirs dating to the 1890s, the first governor of Eritrea, Antonio Gandolfi, exalted the English model and

55 Mariano D'Amelio, 'Colonia Eritrea', in *Enciclopedia giuridica*, vol. 3.2 (Milan: Società Editrice Libreria, 1913), 1057.

56 Commissione nominata da S.E. il commissario civile della colonia Eritrea, ed., *Disegno di codice civile da pubblicarsi nella Colonia Eritrea* (Rome: Unione Cooperativa Editrice, 1905), 9.

57 Giulio Abbate, 'Modelli di colonizzazione. Il dibattito in Italia dal 1864 al 1890', *Le Carte e la Storia*, 1 (2013), 91–110.

harshly criticized French colonialism's 'officialism'.⁵⁸ Speaking of officialism for France meant underlining excessive state intervention in the colonies. Gandolfi could not speak of indirect rule, because the term was more frequent in the twentieth century,⁵⁹ but he outlined a light administration model basically aimed at guaranteeing overseas trade. D'Amelio later called the British the modern Romans⁶⁰ and, in his successful colonial law handbook, Romano defined the assimilation system vaunted by France as 'the result of a romantic ideology which prevails at moments of turmoil and political exaltation', or as the product of detrimental sentimentalism.⁶¹ In the 1930s Malvezzi maintained that it was necessary to abandon the assimilation utopia and condemned the fideistic, intolerant and totalitarian attitude of those civilizations that, armed with a spirit of proselytism, wanted to impose themselves.⁶² By contrast, he praised the British Empire since it adapted the 'the dangerous medicine of civilization' to its various colonial peoples according to their ability to benefit from it.⁶³ Jurist Renzo Sertoli Salis also praised the English model in similar terms.⁶⁴

Italian jurists invariably described the French experience as the product of Enlightenment egalitarianism and its sole consequence as assimilation politics which were considered unrealistic. This was a very widespread simplification among intellectuals discussing colonial models. British colonialism was associated with indirect rule, light administration and governing through pre-existing political structures such as chiefdom. On the contrary, French colonialism was seen as an attempt to assimilate native peoples to French civilization which would end up granting them French *citoyenneté*. In short, the French Empire became the assimilation model. Historians studying the true coherence of these ideal-types agree that theoretical

58 Antonio Gandolfi, Gandolfi, Antonio, 'Memoriale', in *Introduzione*, Gandolfi Fund, Archiginnasio Library (Bologna), folder 1, doc. 1.1, 5, 13, 14.

59 Frederick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1922).

60 D'Amelio, 'Colonia Eritrea', 1055.

61 Romano, *Corso di diritto coloniale*, 33–34, 111.

62 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 3, 32.

63 Malvezzi, *La politica indigena nelle colonie*, 52.

64 Renzo Sertoli Salis, *La giustizia indigena nelle colonie* (Padua: Cedam, 1933).

assimilation, autonomy and subjection options were of greater importance for colonial power self-representation and image than for concrete colonial practice.⁶⁵ Even when the assimilation flag was officially waved,⁶⁶ the real political choices made across the decades across the vast French Empire were anything but unambiguously inspired by assimilation ideology, as a quick glance at the use of citizenship in the colonies shows.⁶⁷ Indeed, quite early on 'French rule did not have a clear approach to relations between colonizers and colonized but rather adjusted to a quickly changing situation', and the administrative categories changed over time.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the stereotype of the French invariably devoted to assimilating indigenous peoples fostered Italian legal debate and prompted considerations of colonial rule methods, an important discussion for an inexperienced latecomer such as Italy.

Art. 2 of R.D. no. 325 of 2 July 1908 – the law that established the Eritrean judicial system – stated that individuals born in a colony who were neither Italian citizens nor citizens of other states but belonged to the colony's tribes and *stirpi* were to be considered colonial subjects. The subsequent Art. 9 of R.D. no. 620 dating to 11 July 1909 established that indigenous customary law applied to colonial subjects and assimilates, as far as was compatible with the spirit of Italian law and civilization. Similarly, Art. 3, paragraph 1, of the first book of the 1909 Eritrean Civil Code stated: 'colonial subjects are individuals who are neither Italian citizens nor citizens of recognized foreign states and are natives of the colony or belong to the latter's tribes and *stirpi*'. Furthermore, Art. 6 of the Preliminary Provisions on the Publication, Interpretation and Application of Laws of the Code established that 'the personal status of colonial subjects and

65 Giorgi, *L'Africa come carriera*, 41–42; Bernard Durand, *Introduction historique au droit colonial* (Paris: Economica, 2015), 339–356.

66 Martin D. Lewis, 'One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French Colonial Policy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4.2 (1962), 129–153.

67 Emmanuelle Saada, 'Nation and Empire in the French Context', in George Steinmetz, ed., *Sociology & Empire: the Imperial Entanglement of a Discipline* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2013), 321–339; Patrick Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un Français?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 345–368.

68 Saada, 'Nation and Empire in the French Context', 327.

their private law relations is governed by local custom, tradition and race as long as these are not incompatible with public order except where the provisions of special laws are concerned'. Ranieri Falcone explicitly mentioned the need for a 'racial code' to protect Italian ethnic and political supremacy in the Criminal Code project.⁶⁹ As a consequence, the colonial criminal code reintroduced corporal punishment and the death penalty for subjects alone. It seriously weakened the system of guarantees valid in Italy by going as far as to introduce 'indeterminate punishment' by which individuals could be jailed for a period not predetermined by the verdict. Jurist Raffaele Garofalo – one of the most important exponents of the so-called School of Positive Law, along with Cesare Lombroso – presented this project before the Colonial Council, affirming that it served to defend the prestige of the Italian race.⁷⁰ The concept of race was crucial to all of the norms quoted above.

In a nutshell, Italian jurists believed that law emerges from social practice and the customs created by specific peoples through particular historical processes rather than being a set of universal norms that can be abstractly imposed by a superior power on every people. They were strongly opposed to the principles of the Enlightenment. In 1914 Ravizza wrote:

Some tirelessly argue that indigenous people must be civilized so that they will evolve towards us and that, for this purpose, laws valid in the colonizing nation should apply to them but this system has laid itself open to criticism and it is now almost universally believed that it is the least suitable, the most damaging and the most unpolitic system.⁷¹

In 1900 prosecutor Ettore De Luca explained that 'laws and codes, which are the result of centuries and centuries of work and the fruit of three great civilizations [...] and which emerged spontaneously from the people they were destined to rule', cannot abruptly be transferred to uncivilized

69 Luciano Martone, *Giustizia coloniale. Modelli e prassi penale per i sudditi d'Africa dall'età giolittiana al fascismo* (Naples: Jovene, 2002), 24.

70 Sagù, 'Sui tentativi di codificazione della colonia Eritrea', 600.

71 Adalgiso Ravizza, 'L'ordinamento legislativo della colonia Eritrea con particolare riferimento alla materia penale', *Rivista Penale*, 80 (1914), 46.

peoples.⁷² These statements opposed the assumption that 'a good law must be good for all men, just as a true proposition is true for all',⁷³ which was a hugely influential idea in the Enlightenment era.

According to a widely shared theory by jurists dealing with colonialism, a universally valid law applying equally to all cannot exist because each people and race must use a legal system born from its own particular historical experience. Jurists commenting on Italian colonial policies presented this idea as form of respect for colonial diversity or 'respect for indigenous traditions'. But differentialism served to justify 'a system of racial separateness' which was presented as the most suitable system to meet the requirements of progress.⁷⁴ Differentialistic arguments were used to set up a legal system that essentially subordinated colonial subjects to Italians. For example, the Criminal Code Commission aimed to lighten penalties for crimes against public morality committed by citizens against colonial subjects. Shortly before this, a verdict by the Massawa Tribunal of 1892 had applied mitigating circumstances to an Italian man who had kidnapped and raped a nine-year-old girl, in consideration of the diversity of the primitive moral habits of the indigenous people involved. According to the tribunal the Italian had simply conformed to local customs.⁷⁵

Once abandoned the idea of applying indigenous legal traditions at all times, colonial rulers sought to elaborate a differential law that would take into account African diversity. An extreme form of the contradiction between declarations of respect for colonial subjects' diversity and actual practice was the reintroduction of corporal punishment and the death penalty in the colonies. Even in the liberal era a strongly racially diversified criminal system was developed in the colonies following the

72 Ravizza, 'L'ordinamento legislativo della colonia Eritrea', 46.

73 Nicolas de Condorcet, *Commentaire sur l'Esprit des lois de Montesquieu; suivi d'Observations inédites de Condorcet, sur le vingt-neuvième livre du même ouvrage* (Paris: Delaunay, 1819), 458.

74 Martone, *Giustizia coloniale*, 24.

75 Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi: antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali nella colonia Eritrea, 1890-1941* (Naples: Liguori, 1988), 253.

principles of the School of Positive Law. In Italy, this school urged special penalties for 'habitual and irredeemable criminals' by disengaging sanctions from judgement of an offence. In the colonies, it affirmed that Africans would not see straightforward imprisonment as a deterrent and life sentences would be more suitable for them.⁷⁶ In 1909 Garofalo stated that 'it was not possible to ignore the effect of a criminal threat on people who have ideas, sensibilities and traditions that are very different from ours, so that some types of penalties and their extent may be totally ineffective or disproportionate, or intolerable for indigenous peoples'.⁷⁷ According to Martini, the death penalty was the only possible deterrent against blood crimes, but only for the natives. Through the rhetoric of paternalism, jurists and rulers affirmed that life imprisonment would be more unbearable than the death penalty for Africans with the latter thus representing a lighter punishment.

Therefore, the discursive framework of respect for indigenous traditions which emerged strongly in the liberal age from the beginning of colonial experience was used to justify legal inequality and conceal racial subjugation to colonial power. It was a long-term approach which developed into a sort of mindset and an ongoing argument in legal debates. Still in the 1930s – at a time of renewed racism and imperialism – it continued to work as an indispensable rhetorical expedient for comparing colonial systems and developing ideal-types out of different European experiences.

In relation to what Italians considered to be traditional African law, it should be noted that colonial powers frequently invented local traditions⁷⁸ and pre-existing legal systems were misinterpreted and manipulated.⁷⁹ Some jurists even argued that the differential system might enhance African legal traditions. For example, Sertoli Salis stated that:

76 Sagù, 'Sui tentativi di codificazione della colonia Eritrea', 601.

77 Raffaele Garofalo, 'Il codice penale della colonia Eritrea', *Rivista coloniale* 4 (1909), 134.

78 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

79 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

The function of indigenous law considered in its autonomous phase (i.e. prior to colonial occupation) is to regulate certain relationships between individuals of the same race, region or, more often, social group. [...] Once it is acknowledged by the [colonial] state, indigenous law becomes officially recognized.⁸⁰

Sertoli Salis argued that the differential system was an acknowledgement of indigenous law, since historical evolution from a unique justice system to a system of dual jurisdiction had to some extent led to a recognition of indigenous law and civilization.⁸¹ This did not derive from any appreciation of such laws and civilization but simply from practical considerations: if the colonial government decided to abolish a colony's indigenous institutions nobody would know how to replace them, as metropolitan institutions were unsuitable for peoples whose social status and race were so different from those of Europeans.⁸²

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that Italian jurists dealing with colonial problems constantly condemned assimilation theories. Yet in different contexts and periods, they promoted a sum of concepts that can be termed differentialism. It was a long-term continuity. In their rhetoric, differentialism preserved respect for different civilizations and social institutions. In fact, norms applying to indigenous people were always inspired by some form of racist contempt as the use of the death penalty shows. Within this system, indigenous law was a 'lower legal order' which was not to apply to legal relations involving both Italian citizens and colonial subjects.⁸³ Therefore, the discursive formation of differentialism was not inspired – to use current categories – by relativism, since it did not postulate equivalence between national and indigenous laws, but rather by a genuine ethnocentrism according to which Europeans could not share their laws with inferior races. It was this naked truth that was destined to come out of the well of legal rhetoric.

80 Sertoli Salis, *La giustizia indigena nelle colonie*, 8–9.

81 Sertoli Salis, *La giustizia indigena nelle colonie*, 2.

82 Sertoli Salis, *La giustizia indigena nelle colonie*, 8.

83 Sertoli Salis, *La giustizia indigena nelle colonie*, 12.

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2 Landscape: Somalia as Seen in Italian Colonial Literature

In 1936, Cesare Maria De Vecchi – one of the four fascist leaders of the March on Rome – published a long memoir about his experiences as the fascist governor of Italian Somalia (1923–1927). The book is called *Orizzonti d'Impero*,¹ a title that brings together political power and the power of the gaze, the observation of a land and its direct control.

There are many influential studies on the relationship between landscape and national identity, on how the latter is constructed by giving meaning to the physical elements of the territory – the mountains or the rivers of the *Fatherland* – which in turn contribute to transforming the men who look at them into citizens, validating the idea of a 'natural boundary', of a 'cradle of such-and-such a civilization', of a privileged link between a certain lineage of men and their 'living space'. A similar mechanism can be seen in the formation of colonial identities, but it has not been studied in such a systematic way.

Derek Gregor underlines how colonial discourse – constituted of representations, practices and performances – has as one of its objectives 'the production of imaginative geographies that construct and calibrate a distance between colonized and colonizing societies'.² In postcolonial studies, these *new geographies* have been analysed above all as *new territories*, highlighting the introduction of limits and boundaries. However, Gregor points out that these new lines of demarcation are not drawn on an empty

¹ Cesare Maria De Vecchi, *Orizzonti d'Impero* (Milan: Mondadori, 1936).

² Derek Gregor, '(Post)Colonialism and the Production of Nature', in Noel Castree and Bruce Braun, eds, *Social Nature. Theory, Practice, and Policy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 86.

space, and therefore involve another aspect of colonial discourse: the production of nature, or rather the definition of what is meant by that term and what use should be made of it. This is a vital integration and, yet, I believe the production of nature and that of territory are not distinct operations, but they are both part of a more general *production of landscape*.

In this sense, Andrew Sluyter argues that the main point of contention between natives and colonizers was not the land with its resources, but rather the landscape. This statement may seem hasty to those who consider landscape to be a cultural superstructure, or rather the 'representation of a territory', its aesthetic dimension. On the contrary, since 'people transform landscape through processes of labour *and* categorization', speaking of conflict around landscape shows two aspects of colonization in a single term: 'conflict over space and conflict through space'.³ This contrast was both cultural and material, and its effects are felt to this day, not only because the territory was physically altered, but also because the pre-colonial models of settlement, cultivation, customs and property were eliminated and discredited. Indeed, the expression 'fight for the landscape' can be considered a synonym of 'fight to live', since the territory becomes a landscape because it is inhabited in a certain way, just as an apartment becomes a home with objects, plants, individuals and their mutual relationships.

This chapter draws on Sluyter's ideas about colonization and landscape in order to analyse accounts and diaries written by Italian travellers and explorers during their stay in Somalia. Moreover, I will interrogate these texts in relation to the questions asked by Marie Louise Pratt in her landmark essay *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*:

How travel books by Europeans about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the 'domestic subject' of Euroimperialism; how they have engaged metropolitan reading publics with (or to) expansionist enterprises whose material benefits accrued mainly to the very few; how has travel and exploration writing [...] produced Europe's differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it

3 Andrew Sluyter, *Colonialism and Landscape* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 11, emphasis added.

became possible to call 'the rest of the world'? How do such signifying practices encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire?⁴

My analysis highlights some *visual strategies*, or rather techniques of representation, taking into account that the representation of a landscape is an action that happens *in* it, one of the many gestures that can be made to live in it and transform it, with a hoe or with words.

One of the first chapters of *Horizons of Empire* starts with this programmatic declaration:

A Colony, a controlled territory, is not only valuable for what it is, but also for what it can be. In the intuition of its function, in the vision of its development, is the reason for the force that it can demand from the dominant state, the sacrifices that it requires from the men who are chosen to serve it. Knowing how to see is, for the strong, a will, and, for those who have a sense of responsibility, a passionate will.⁵

The expression 'knowing how to see is a matter of will' and the title of De Vecchi's text reveal the close link between the gaze and control, with particular reference to the occupation of a territory. Above all, it is significant that De Vecchi uses the expression 'knowing how to see' and not simply 'seeing'. The relationship between human beings and their environment always entails an education of the senses, which teaches you to focus attention on certain features in the surrounding space. Yet, this training of perception can be carried out and interpreted in at least two different ways. On one hand, there is the idea that a set of conceptual strategies and abstract forms in the human mind can be transmitted in different languages, from experts to novices, allowing the latter to make sense of the world, to cover their own environment with a map of meanings. In this view, landscape is born by imprinting pre-existing cultural categories on the physical territory. Only when individuals 'know how to see' can they also *live*, that is, relate to the space around them. A diametrically opposed approach would be to consider 'knowing how to see' a *product* of living: it is through the forest

4 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

5 De Vecchi, *Orizzonti d'Impero*, 47.

that the novice hunter learns both how to become an expert hunter and about the forest itself: what traces to observe, what signs to read.⁶ It is not therefore a set of concepts and 'visions' that need to be appropriated before facing that environment. The education of the senses is not a *prerequisite* of living, but vice versa: it is living that *entails* this progressive education. Landscape is not a territory 'seen' or 'perceived' through the prism of a particular culture, but it is somewhere we live. Man and environment shape one another through all the activities that life brings. De Vecchi's apodictic phrase – 'knowing how to see is a matter of will' – is inscribed entirely in the tradition of the first type, emblematic of modern thought and particularly suited to being a tool of the colonial enterprise. According to the above-mentioned passage in De Vecchi's *Orizzonti d'Impero*, 'knowing how to see' means having a cultural code, allowing the interpretation of a 'controlled territory [...] for what it is, but also for what it can be'. This means having plans and projects – that is, an existing model of the world – through which to look and therefore will, just as an artisan 'sees' a bowl in a log of wood then realizes this vision – the more clearly seen the better.

From the other perspective, however, the artisan is more similar to a gardener, who grows works of art through a relationship with them. Without doubt, the colonial enterprise was strengthened – rhetorically and operationally – thanks to the idea that man is an external observer, capable of scrutinizing the natural world from the cultural world above and, thanks to this detachment, prepares to occupy the environment, giving it a form based on his wishes, that is, inscribing his web of meanings onto it, whilst nevertheless remaining independent of where he lives, ready to travel on ships, to shape new territories. Not coincidentally, William John Thomas Mitchell states in his nine 'theses on landscape' that 'landscape is a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism' (where 'landscape' is not understood as a place, or as an aesthetic object, but as a 'visual/pictorial medium' and 'representational practice').⁷ In the

6 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 40–60.

7 William John Thomas Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape', in William John Thomas Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

same way, Gregor notes the dualism of the 'modern viewing subject, constructed as a disembodied and distanced observer, with the [...] extraordinary power to discover the "real" order of [...] an otherwise errant universe [...] is inherently colonizing, no matter where it takes place'.⁸

The adventurers and fugitives of the Old Continent, who inhabited North America during the seventeenth century, had a very clear image in their minds of earthly Paradise: a beautiful, neat garden, which Adam and Eve had been chased away from into a chaotic and wild world. Their descendants' task was to transform Earth again into that lost Eden. According to the principle of *vacuum domicilium*, whoever dedicated themselves to this effort over 'empty' soil would make it theirs thanks to care and dedication (husbandry).

Therefore, the first visual strategy implemented by colonists was one of *emptying*, that is *knowing how to see* in front of them a free and wild space. Yet, since that space was far from empty, this strategy came with another: also including the natives in the landscape, looking at them as if they were 'nature', so that their actions on the territory appeared to be a phenomenon as natural as the changing of the seasons. Thus, Europeans felt free to occupy that 'empty' space, with a resulting reduction in the use of the land for the natives, therefore a thickening of the forests, so that they could be seen as even more wild, to thus appropriate an even vaster space.⁹ By removing the indigenous people from the landscape, denying them from sight, it was possible to substitute it with a primitive environment, outside of History, a virgin territory ready to be possessed by those who would change it into a garden (and a cemetery).

At a distance of 300 years, the gaze of Italian colonists on the lands of Somalis used a revised and corrected version of that original *strategy of emptiness*. Above all, in their descriptions, the landscape is always monotonous, infinite, immense, endless, bleak. Adjectives of that kind fill all of these texts, usually accompanied by some deprivation, introduced by the word 'without'. Since defining and distinguishing borders is one of the cognitive operations that make sense of the world, saying that a landscape

8 Gregor, '(Post)Colonialism and the Production of Nature', 93.

9 Sluyter, *Colonialism and Landscape*.

is 'limitless' goes hand in hand with judging it to be 'senseless'. This is how the hunter Vittorio T. Zammarano narrated what he saw in 1921 when going up onto the dune behind the port of Barawa:

Seen from above, this succession of hills without consistency, without solidity, with no other limit than the horizon, where nothing appears, nothing settles and every voice is silenced, almost buried, without reflections; this eternal stormy succession of countless waves of earth, resembling and continuing the sea, has such desolate magnificence that it provokes horror and exultation. Anyone wishing to cover with form and colour and to enclose in a single representation the naked, abstract concepts of purity, infinity and eternity should come to be inspired before these immaculate surging seas of sand.¹⁰

The same place provoked similar impressions in Bernardo V. Vecchi a few years later: 'The white town, huddled and leaning over the immense sea, whilst another sea, blue too, so shrouded in morning mists and endless, extends beyond the dune: the infinite bush'.¹¹ This description is not very different – except for the emotional tone – from the one of the port of Kismaayo, a little further south, written by Bruno Barilli in 1941, with reference to a journey ten years earlier: 'What bleakness – a true *tabula rasa*. No sign of life. [...] Kismaio hides, defends itself: small, colourless, buried in sand'.¹²

None of the authors of these texts ever seem to think that this uniformity, this 'landscape without', is the result of 'not knowing how to see' and, before that, of 'not knowing how to live'. The attitude of these writers does not only depend on the inability to question their own power of interpretation, but also reflects what Pratt calls anti-conquest, or rather 'the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony'.¹³ In other words, these writers seem to say through their depiction of the

10 Vittorio Tedesco Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones. Un anno di esplorazione e di caccia in Somalia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1930), 137.

11 Bernardo Valentino Vecchi, *Vecchio Benadir* (Milan: Alpes, 1930), 151.

12 Bruno Barilli, *Il sole in trappola. Diario del periplo dell'Africa* (1931) (Florence: Sansoni, 1943), 233, 238.

13 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 7.

landscape 'It is not me who wants to conquer them, it is the African lands that are available!'

The Italians are certainly aware of having a limited knowledge of the territory, but that does not make them doubt their own categories. They admit to having imprecise geographical maps, but they attribute their errors to the incompetence of the individual cartographer and more often to the 'caprices' of African nature:

This modest backwater has taken on an importance for some cartographers that it does not really deserve: the compiler of our map on a scale of 200,000 drew a lake there. Seeing it like that, delicately coloured blue, almost sparkling in the middle of an arid and monotonous region, brings a desire to run to its shores to holiday there. Rossi had the good sense to bring along with him a plentiful supply of water. Without this foresight, I believe that, in a new case for the annals of exploration, he would have died of thirst sitting on the bottom of the lake.¹⁴

This is why most of the expeditions used local guides, sometimes employing them, sometimes forcing them, but as soon as they went from simply locating water to asking for more detailed information, the knowledge of the colonizers was diminished:

The native's information always has a relative value. It is not that they do not know; on the contrary, they generally know their region perfectly [...] It is that it is not easy to make the native understand what we really want to know, and, therefore, too often the responses to our questions do not have the value that they could have.¹⁵

This passage does not seem to refer only to a linguistic problem, meaning the native provides information of relative value because of a bad translation. It is the 'knowledge' of the territory that has a 'relative value', even when it is perfect, because it clearly does not include 'what we really want to know'. An interesting case is that of the Jubba and Shebelle rivers, which the Italians long tormented themselves over in an attempt to determine their flow, whilst the natives gave different names to different parts of the same flow of water.

14 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 223.

15 Giovanni Battista Carniglia, *La vallata del Giuba* (Turin: De Agostini, 1927), 13.

Armed with a 'purified' distinction between nature and culture,¹⁶ these explorers and travellers had to choose: faced with a territory where they were not able to read the signs, either they recognized their *cultural blindness*, or they attributed this lack of meaning to the territory itself. In other words, this territory did not *seem* featureless, it *was*. In this way, far from feeling inadequate to live in this space, because they were lacking the tools to understand it, the Italians felt, on the contrary, *destined* to fill it with meaning. 'We are allowed, even if we are allowed, to strive for the desert', wrote Cesare Correnti with a typical sense of victimhood, just a year after the Berlin Conference of 1885, about Italy's role in the partition of Africa. 'And at least nobody will be able to stop us', he goes on, 'from moving to move and not to let us die with blood and desire on us'. The following passage also includes relevant insight to understand Correnti's ideas:

Involuntarily, I was thinking about our big and numerous cities, where a whole population busies itself around shops and businesses, our verdant planes alternating with lovely hills golden with harvests, where the colonist is absorbed in agricultural life; and this majestic and immense solitude, in which man, though feeling tiny in his isolation, feels the satisfaction of being the sole master of the nature that surrounds him!¹⁷

It is difficult to find a more apt example of the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' type, as Pratt calls it: 'The only "person" mentioned in these "[...] solitudes" is the hypothetical and invisible European traveller himself'.¹⁸ Correnti, Zammarano, Vecchi and other travellers translate into their gaze environmental determinism, that is, the theory according to which European colonialism was in the nature of things, and Nature itself invoked it with its characteristics. This theory still manages to find space today in more 'acceptable' forms, when it is used to claim that European demographic pressure made colonial expansion inevitable in North America.

16 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

17 Cesare Correnti, 'Prefazione', in Società Geografica Italiana, ed., *Da Zeila alle frontiere del Caffa. Viaggi di Antonio Cecchi*, vol. 1 (Rome: Loescher, 1886), 32.

18 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 125.

The presumed virginity of these places is a characteristic that lends itself well to this reading given that, in the mentality of the time, a virgin was none other than a girl of marriageable age, a body waiting to be penetrated and bear fruit. For instance, Vecchi describes the forest of Mansur as

the most beautiful and most evocative of Africa imaginable. No description of the imaginative and unfortunate Salgari overcomes the profound impression created by this amazing tangle of impressive vegetation. We mapped out a road there, after the transfer of Jubaland from the English, who had left it unexplored. First, we violated the virginity of this barrier of trunks [...] which were only worth the blows of an axe.¹⁹

This feminized nature – which, no matter how wild, allows itself to be dominated by 'the blows of an axe' – evokes, however, the spectre of its opposite, that is, a nature that is so aggressive as to bring a fear of *being penetrated*.²⁰ Edoardo Costantini, from Belluno, confided in his letters to his family his fears about the African climate: 'I hope, before the tropical sun has indigenized me, to escape to Italy'.²¹ In this case, environmental determinism is turned on its head: it is not 'colonial masculinity' that is destined to take possession of virgin lands, but the 'intemperate' climate of Somalia that risks corrupting it.

Yet, from the *tabula rasa* of the Somali landscape, a human presence emerges from time to time, also recognizable to the Italian observers. What strategy to use, then, in order not to lose the right to 'strive for the desert'? The first solution, as has already been mentioned, consists of attributing these presences to nature. A passage from *Vecchio Benadir* on the city of Mogadishu is interesting in this regard:

Much has been built and with excellent town planning, thus managing to stop Europeans living in Arab houses, often in contact with natives, a real scourge for us who must never distance ourselves from the concept of keeping up white prestige at all costs. [...] In a few years, Mogadishu will have wide, straight streets shaded by

19 Vecchi, *Vecchio Benadir*, 163.

20 Gregor, '(Post)Colonialism and the Production of Nature', 90.

21 Edoardo Costantini, *Un Bellunese in Somalia. Lettere di Edoardo Costantini a Polpei (1934–1936)* (Belluno: Istituto Storico Bellunese della Resistenza e dell'Era Contemporanea, 2001), 199.

coconut trees that will give it the coquettish and picturesque appearance of a real equatorial city. The passionate colonial longs for many picturesque aspects of the colony that civilization invades more and more. Luckily, it only takes half an hour to reach naked, placid and silent men who live indifferently to everything in the shade of conical tuculs on the river.²²

While the indigenous people living in the urban context of Mogadishu are perceived as embarrassing neighbours who have to be eliminated with the weapons of urban planning, those who live away from the city centre are romanticized. Indeed, the passage above describes them as presences as calm as the waters of a river, deprived of voice, indifferent as tree trunks. They are part of a natural landscape that fills the passionate colonizer with longing.

Since the authors of the accounts analysed are all male, it is not surprising that female subjects are more often naturalized: 'in one of the hollows in the terrain, where water has gathered, a group of women dive in, dark-haired and shapely dryads of the African bush, amid the whiteness of the water lilies'.²³ However, the habit of reifying women's bodies precedes colonialism, which in fact borrows its language of the conquest of orientalized prey from the masculine imaginary of the conquest of sexual prey. This can be seen in this extract from Giuseppe Zucca's *Il paese di madreperla. Sette mesi in Somalia*, taken from a chapter completely dedicated to the 'conquest' of women, where female natives and Italians are treated as fruit of the earth and, as such, they belong to whoever occupies the land that produces them: 'Beautiful, very beautiful women – as for millennia the mountains and valleys of the Peninsula – are produced for Italy, an excellent gourmand, by the endless plains of Somalia, voluptuously lying in the powerful sun of the Equator'.²⁴

The strategy we have seen thus far, that of *naturalization*, becomes more difficult when the natives are not only a presence in the landscape, like plants and animals, but show themselves with *cultural* traces and visible interventions on it. In this case, then, these traces are *minimized*, so that

22 Vecchi, *Vecchio Benadir*, 64–66.

23 Giuseppe Stefanini, *In Somalia. Note e impressioni di viaggio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1922), 87.

24 Giuseppe Zucca, *Il paese di madreperla. Sette mesi in Somalia* (Milan: Alpes, 1926), 135.

they are noticed and immediately erased. Zammarano describes the coast of Italian Somalia as it appears to him after having rounded Cape Guardafui, the outermost point of the Horn of Africa, as follows: 'From North to South, the promontory is eroded into a monotonous coast, characterized by an uninterrupted string of sand dunes that block the view inland. In rare inlets [...] Majeerteen sambuks take refuge and modest camps appear. The coast, on the whole, is uninhabited'.²⁵

It is interesting to note the contradiction – or the revealing slip – between the existence of camps (although 'modest'), the boats in the inlets (although 'rare') and the overall assessment of whether the coast is populated or 'uninhabited'. Giuseppe Stefanini, in his account of a journey taken eight years before Zammarano, instead informs us that the area is known for piracy, and is therefore anything but deserted: 'It is said that on dark nights, when fog looms over the sea or when the monsoon flares up, the inhabitants light artificial fires in suitable places and, making use of the shape of the coast and of the play of the currents, mislead the ships and cause shipwrecks, then profiting from the remains'.²⁶

The strategy of devaluing the agricultural activities of Somalis also minimizes their presence in, and impact on, their land. Capitan Baudi di Vesme, arriving in Hargeisa, notes that: 'The scenery is pleasant. The eye rests on the beautiful green of cultivated fields of grain (*sorghum cernuum*), which grows there abundantly and without needing much care'.²⁷ Giuseppe Scortecci's reaction on seeing the Carim oasis while travelling on the road from Garoe to Bosaso also needs to be mentioned. Palms appear to him as 'a miracle', whilst the few local natives limit themselves to cultivating 'a few greens':

After a long meander through valleys and dales, the road goes onto a short shelf where one has the impression of witnessing a miracle: surrounded by high mountains, desperately bleak, as if appearing out of the sunny rock, there is an oasis with hundreds of very tall palms of a dazzling green, with a tangle of other short palms at

25 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 11.

26 Stefanini, *In Somalia*, 17.

27 Enrico Baudi di Vesme and Giuseppe Candeo, 'Un'escursione nel paradiso dei Somali', *Bollettino della società geografica italiana* (1893), 27.

the base, bushes, and among these streams of clear, flowing water. In Carim, there is not a true village: there are a few shacks of nomads [...], two or three shacks where the few natives live [...] who do their utmost to cultivate a few greens.²⁸

The territory changes but not the gaze through which Vecchi sees the banks of the Jubba River and finds them so fertile that the natives need do nothing to make them fruitful: 'The terrain of the plain does not have a very promising outer appearance, but, after being irrigated, it transformed into bright green and lush gardens, a large number of which are due only to rudimentary irrigation works of no account made by riverside natives.'²⁹

Just a year later, Bruno Barilli attributed these same agricultural works 'of no account' to the progress that this valley made after being passed from Great Britain to Italy: 'Towards the interior, however, it is quite different [compared to the wretchedness of the coast]. This far edge of the colony has undergone an incredible transformation in a few years. Following the river upstream, the agricultural works have made very fast progress.'³⁰ It is worth noting that Barilli is on his first journey to the colony, therefore cannot compare this 'very fast progress' based on his own experience. Yet, unable to attribute it to the natives – that is, to see their ability to transform the landscape – he puts it down to brilliant Italian successes.

Another version of the *strategy of emptiness* is to deny the existence of a native landscape, as the natives would not be aware of it, and thus would not have the *cultural*, aesthetic and political ability to 'know how to see'. Giuseppe Zucca, in narrating his visit to the Duca degli Abruzzi Agricultural Village on the Shebelle River, argues that the natives' intervention on the landscape resembles the construction of a termite mound by an army of insects rather than being the result of their agricultural know-how:

When we arrived, a mass of black people, shiny in the midday sun, was working on the construction of a tertiary canal, watched by a few whites. There was a harmonious and disciplined back and forth of human ants, each carrying his small load of

- 28 Giuseppe Scortecci, 'Un viaggio di studi nella Somalia Settentrionale', *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 39 (1932), 8.
 29 Vecchi, *Vecchio Benadir*, 222.
 30 Barilli, *Il sole in trappola*, 241.

earth to raise the double bump of the bank. That industrious mass was unknowingly serving this high dream of Latin beauty.³¹

The juxtaposition of natives and ants serves to trace a boundary between natives and colonizers, who instead elevate themselves above animals, as bringers of culture, and therefore *subjects* of History among *objects* of Evolution.

We can see similarities in the engineer Robecchi Bricchetti's observation on the practice of burning the bush to then sow the cleared terrain, without giving a thought to its final appearance:

This is a primitive system of farming and simultaneous fertilization. Nor, in homage to the prim symmetry and feeling of elegance that are typical of the Latin races, do they give a thought to whether the fire spared some big, ancient tree trunk, and, if one has remained, they do not worry about cutting it down or uprooting it, but sow all around the obstacle.³²

This strategic denial of the other's landscape also spills onto the conceptual and physical resistance that the natives put up against their annihilation. However, this event is not acknowledged as part of History. In a note written in Merca on 29 June 1935, during his experience of building canals, Edoardo Costantini complains how difficult it is to teach the local workforce, since Somalis, after learning the job, go away just as they came, after a few months, 'who knows why'.³³ Yet, according to Vecchi, 'persuading Somalis to work so that they are productive is almost a utopia', especially if they are nomadic shepherds. It is no coincidence that they inhabit a very different landscape from Italians: for them, the richness of a land does not depend on the fertility of the soil, but on the presence of water wells and bush. The same 'infinite bush' that Barilli's eye ranges over without encountering signs of any value: 'How much horizon. Here space is not expensive. It is not the precious and taxed air of our cities. [...] There, on

31 Zucca, *Il paese di madreperla*, 49–50.

32 Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti, *Nel paese degli aromi. Diario di una esplorazione nell'Africa Orientale, da Obbia ad Alula* (Milan: Cogliati, 1903), 77.

33 Costantini, *Un Bellunese in Somalia*, 192.

the horizon, where our domain ends, three hours' drive from here, armed men from neighbouring tribes gather. [...] Border disputes. Grazing rights. Intrigues of neighbouring Ras'.³⁴ Yet, it is precisely the 'grazing rights' and the 'border disputes' that should demonstrate that this space is in fact precious, and that the conflict to conquer it is far from being a simple *intrigue*.

The most surprising consequence of this elimination of the native landscape is the different evaluation of the changes to the environment brought about by colonists and natives. The latter, 'unknowing' and instinctive, intervene in the environment in a messy, and therefore potentially damaging, way, whilst the former always do so rationally as those who 'know how to see'. In this sense, the case of the hunter Zammarano is emblematic: in *Hic Sunt Leones. Un anno di esplorazione e di caccia in Somalia*, he denounces the massacres of dwarf antelope (dik-dik) carried out by Somalis:

Complete extermination has already been carried out in huge areas. [...] It is said that their meat has saved entire starving tribes from death: this is one of the usual hypocrisies with which man tries to smother remorse. [...] When they have completely disappeared, it will be realized that it was also possible to live without killing them.³⁵

A few pages later, the same author – after having exterminated big and small antelope, hippopotamuses, warthogs, elephants and crocodiles – recognizes 'the small spurge wood in which, six years ago, I killed a gigantic rhinoceros, the only survivor of his breed in these parts'.³⁶ He then asks 'some shepherds if these woods still harboured one of these giants'.³⁷ He is pleased when one of them remembers that 'a long time ago, a man who ruled over this region had, just near here, killed the last "huil"'.³⁸ 'The information was correct', comments Zammarano, 'laughing', after being scandalized about the indiscriminate killing of the dik-dik by 'hungry tribes'.³⁹

34 Barilli, *Il sole in trappola*, 247.

35 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 26.

36 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 66.

37 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 66.

38 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 67.

39 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 26.

The last strategy in the process of transforming the native landscape into a colonial landscape that I would like to analyse is that of *Italianization*. I have found three types. The first consists of 'knowing how to see' the resemblances between the exotic territory and the motherland. 'It is in fact a similar landscape to the one often observed in Italy [...] in the Pliocene clay of the Emilian "badlands"',⁴⁰ states Stefanini about the geological formations that appear to him from the dune of Merca. Yet, almost wanting to point out that African nature is still always wild and in need of domination, just two lines below he calls these same badlands 'the horrible bloody pit opening up beneath our feet', describing them with emotive words and tones that he certainly would not use for the Pliocene clay of Emilia. As Gregor states:

The central representational predicament was to find a way of conveying the otherness of other natures (and other cultures), of bringing them within a European project of a universal 'earth-writing' that would make them intelligible to metropolitan audiences without at the same time destroying the very signs that marked them as other.⁴¹

A second move instead consists of attributing the power of nationalizing the landscape to the visible signs of the Italian presence, in a sort of transmission of sacredness through touch. The 'white boxes on which the tricolour flag flutters', spotted by Zammarano along the coast, thus become 'the vanguards of Italy on the Indian Ocean'.⁴² Similarly, Robecchi Bricchetti, seeing the Italian flag on the Sultan of Hobyo's palace, has the impression that 'a patch of our beloved country had been transported down there'.⁴³ For the same reason, Stefanini says that he is not in favour of the construction of a lighthouse on Cape Guardafui 'with an international contribution to the costs of upkeep': 'It is clear that the lighthouse of Guardafui should be an affirmation of Italian-ness, effective as an armed occupation of the

40 Stefanini, *In Somalia*, 57–58.

41 Gregor, '(Post)Colonialism and the Production of Nature', 91–92, emphasis in the original.

42 Zammarano, *Hic sunt leones*, 11.

43 Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti, *Somalia e Benadir. Viaggio di esplorazione nell'Africa orientale* (Milan: Aliprandi, 1899), 18.

territories, especially significant from a moral perspective, as a sign and symbol of the aims of civilization and progress that Italy puts forward in its colonial policy'.⁴⁴ Eleven years after this journey, Stefanini's idea was put into practice by the Italian government, who first had a metal framework made to support the lantern, and then replaced it with a stone tower in the shape of the fascist lictor. The lighthouse was the setting of at least two battles against Majeerteen rebels, commemorated respectively by a plaque and a funerary monument, which was built at a short distance from the lighthouse by the governor De Vecchi to remember Captain Alessandro Gatti, who died on 24 January 1926 during the armed conflict.

'The blood spilt' is the third element used by Italian colonialism to nationalize the Somali landscape. An example of this use is present in the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* [Guide to Italian East Africa], published in 1938:

The areas of Eritrea and Somalia are of very special interest, sacred for the blood spilt by us in the distant and recent past. They are places that would not have anything of note for the tourist, but assume huge historical and sentimental importance. [...] Pioneers and tourists do not forget the fitting tribute to the Fallen who rest in the cemeteries that mark the stages of Victory.⁴⁵

Particularly in the years of the fascist regime, monuments, columns, grave-stones and memorials sprang up in those places that were 'sacred for the Fatherland', transforming the lands of the colonies into 'patches of our beloved country', in the geographical equivalent of the Christian martyrs' baptism of blood. These memorials were erected so that the landscape could show its Italian-ness in the eyes of both common Italian citizens and colonized subjects, who otherwise *would not know how to see*. At the end of the 1930s, pleasure trips to the territories of the Empire were available to very few Italians, and they would never become a widespread experience. Yet, the Italian Tourism Association published the *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, producing – as the front cover states – 490,000 copies,

44 Stefanini, *In Somalia*, 19.

45 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* (Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938), 15.

free for members in 1938'. The book 'puts forward above all an ideal aim', writes Senator Carlo Bonardi in the preface, 'that of paying homage to the majesty of the Imperial King, to the Duce as founder of the Empire [...], to the Heroes fallen in the name of Italy'.⁴⁶ *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* is therefore a celebratory monument in itself – it could be called a meta-monument – constructed to correspond 'to the need of all Italians to get to know an endless land more and more and better and better'.⁴⁷ Only in the last lines does Bonardi mention 'the clear tourist objectives' of the *Guida*, and sees the main reason for interest in these 'new lands' again as the 'blood of our brothers' that was spilt there.⁴⁸ In the chapter on 'Warnings and General Information', it is underlined that *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* 'obviously has particular aims and features' compared to other volumes that are included in the *Guida d'Italia* [Guide to Italy].⁴⁹ 'In fact, for now, one can only just speak of tourism in the Empire', and, consequently, this 'first "guiding" description [...] aims to be an effective contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of the Empire'.⁵⁰ But why is this contribution given in the form of a tourist guide, as if tourism was already possible and practised, when it was still a what if from literary fiction? It could be argued that an important reason is the need to educate the gaze of Italians, also at a distance and in a virtual way, transforming the 500,000 members of the Italian Tourism Association into potential tourists. The tourist, the citizen of the motherland on holiday, contributes to certifying the Italianization of the foreign landscape, constructed on the accounts of explorers, the architects of the regime, the bullets and massacres of the army. Thanks to a Guide for armchair tourists, which teaches *knowing how to see* the Empire even when still sitting in the living room at home, the space of the colonies can be perceived through fictional speculation rather than through history and geography.

46 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, 5.

47 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, 5.

48 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, 6.

49 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, 13.

50 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, 13.

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LEE CASSANELLI

3 History: Italian Fascist Visions of Somalia's Past and Future

Among the encounters between colonizers and colonized which left lasting legacies in the postcolonial era were those which sought to refashion the history of the colonized subjects in ways that served the imperial mission – a process quite familiar to scholars of cultural imperialism in Africa and elsewhere. While European administrators and scholars can be credited with some of the earliest efforts to preserve archaeological ruins, assemble historical artifacts, and collect local oral traditions in the territories they ruled, postcolonial scholarship has exposed how colonial-era representations of the African past were decidedly Eurocentric, paternalistic, and/or self-serving. Even where the data collected and preserved in colonial repositories of various sorts have proven invaluable to later generations of historians, they are invariably tainted by the uses to which they were put in the colonial era itself.

This chapter explores how the Italian Fascist regime in Somalia (1923–1941) sought to formulate a history of its colonial subjects which served its larger imperial project in the Horn of Africa. It looks at two endeavors which were launched by the fascist authorities at the height of their power in the colony in the 1930s: the establishment of a cultural museum in the colonial capital of Mogadishu, and an intelligence-gathering operation along the colony's disputed frontier with neighbouring Ethiopia. While the two projects – one ostensibly cultural, the other overtly political – appear on the surface to have little in common, I will suggest that they shared a common vision of Italy's imperial objectives in North East Africa. The Garesa Museum, which opened in 1934, provided a showcase for Italy's 'civilizing mission'; and the 1932 Directive to collect ethnographic data from Somali clans which straddled the border with Ethiopia anticipated by only a few years the invasion of Ethiopia which Italian propagandists claimed

would re-unite Somalis on both sides of the border. Both projects reveal the regime's use of local 'culture and history' as a source of legitimation for its actions on the ground.

Mussolini's effective assumption of power in Rome in October 1922 was soon felt in the colonies. The first pro-fascist governor, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, was appointed to help reinvigorate a colonial mission which many prominent fascist intellectuals believed had been timid and unproductive. By the late 1920s, Somalia's administration, reflecting De Vecchi's lament in his later memoir that 'everything had to be restarted all over again', had launched several large agricultural projects, constructed the country's first railway, and reorganized the colony's security forces and rural administration.¹ While the development of commercial agriculture and the strengthening of the local infrastructure may have been admirable goals, we now know that they were intended in part to mobilize the Somalia colony as a staging ground for imperial expansion: Mussolini and his colonial advisers had from the mid-1920s already begun contemplating a second Italian invasion of neighbouring Ethiopia when time and circumstances were ripe.² Given these intentions, one can readily see the significance of the various forms of cultural propaganda which, in hindsight, appear to have escalated alongside the visible physical transformations in Somalia italiana. 'Valorizzazione' of the colony required both material and moral investment.

The Garesa Museum

In the Preface to the Catalogue which had been prepared by the government in anticipation of the opening of a cultural museum in Mogadishu, we read: '*The Garesa Museum demonstrates that the colonial project of us*

1 Cesare Maria De Vecchi, *Orizzonti d'Impero: Cinque anni in Somalia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1935), 25.

2 Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale: La conquista dell'impero*, vol. 2 (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1979), 51 ff.

Latins does not stop with utilitarian forms of exploitation, but reaches into the history and spirit of the country in order to understand it and develop it according to the genius of our race'.³ The preface was written by Francesco Saverio Caroselli, who at the time was Secretary General to the Governor of Somalia (Maurizio Rava) and who would himself become the Governor of the Italian East African Empire following the occupation of Ethiopia. Caroselli had studied law and the classics at university, served as an advisor to the governors of Libya and Eritrea, and published several books on the African societies under Italian rule.⁴ Caroselli believed firmly in Italy's colonial enterprise, even as he criticized many of his contemporaries for their lack of familiarity with African cultures and customs. He became one of the most articulate exponents of Italy's 'civilizing mission'.

The Garesa Museum which Caroselli inaugurated was housed in an ornate two-storey palace which had once served as a residence for the Omani Arab governors of Mogadishu. The Omani sultanate, after moving its headquarters to Zanzibar in 1840, sought to exercise its fiscal authority over the coastal towns of East Africa, including Mogadishu. It did so by appointing *walis* [governors, sing. *wali*] to protect the interests of its commercial agents and by erecting customs houses in an attempt to collect duties on imports and exports. The Garesa in Mogadishu was popularly known by local Somalis as Barghash's Palace, named after the Omani sultan who was ruling in Zanzibar at the time of its construction (1871–1872).

In 1890, during the partition of Africa, the Omani sultan ceded the Somali portion of his coastal claims to the Italians, who retained the name *garesa* (from Arabic *qasr*, palace) for the imposing residence. Located on the seaward end of the road which divided the two ancient quarters of old

3 Francesco Saverio Caroselli, 'Prefazione', in Francesco Saverio Caroselli, ed., *Catalogo. Museo della Garesa (Somalia)* (Mogadishu: Regio governo della Somalia, 1934), 3, emphasis in the original.

4 Among Francesco Saverio Caroselli's publications was *Ferro e fuoco in Somalia: venti anni di lotta contro il Mullah e i Dervisci* [Fire and the Sword in Somalia: Twenty Years of Struggle Against the Mullah and Dervishes] (Rome: Sindacato Italiano Arti Grafiche, 1931), a well-documented account of the rise and fall of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, the fiery resistance leader and poet widely known in the popular Western press as the 'Mad Mullah of Somaliland'.

Mogadishu, and with a panoramic view of the Indian Ocean waterfront, the Garesa became the site, as several travelers tell us, of many squabbles between the Omani authorities and the local Somali business community which resented the former's pretensions.⁵ After the Italian government assumed direct control of Mogadishu in 1905, the Garesa served as a warehouse to store administrative records and municipal materiel. Caroselli tells us that plans to turn the Garesa into a national museum for Somalia Italiana had been in the works for some years; but it was only in the late 1920s – the heyday of fascist administration – that funds were provided to renovate it so as 'to accommodate a Museum of Somalia'. It opened to the public in 1934.

Until falling into disrepair in the 1970s, the Garesa was undoubtedly one of the finest (and least-visited) historical museums in sub-Saharan Africa. Behind its imposing carved wooden doors, a half-dozen spacious rooms on the ground floor – restored 'completely in harmony with the artistic and aesthetic traditions of the country' – became galleries which displayed coins, ceramics, religious manuscripts, and elegant furniture donated or purchased from the wealthy residents of Somalia's historic coastal towns. Other rooms contained samples of Somali material culture, including woven fabrics, jewellery, musical instruments, weapons and agricultural tools, religious masks, and surgical instruments from different parts of the country. The Museum also housed geological, botanical, and zoological samples, along with photographs and correspondence documenting the recent Italian presence in the Horn. The Catalogue itself filled 179 pages, with an additional 109 pages of photographic reproductions of the Museum's major holdings.

Like many state-sponsored museums in colonial Africa, the Garesa was both a symbol of Western cultural appropriation and a local curiosity.⁶

5 Lee Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 175–176, 198–89.

6 For comparative examples from colonial Africa, see Agbenyega Adedze, 'Symbols of Triumph: IFAN and the Colonial Museum Complex in French West Africa (1938–1960)', *Museum Anthropology*, 25.2 (2000), 50–60; Maarten Courtneier, 'Between Regionalization and Centralization: The Creation of Musée Léopold II

Throughout the continent, the colonial powers established local museums to display samples of the natural, ethnographic, and historical 'wonders' found in their territories, in part to fascinate their European residents and visitors, but also to introduce Western ideas of cultural preservation, classification, and aesthetics to their colonial subjects. In the case of the relatively impoverished Italian colonies, museums also served to express (and to embellish) the virtue of the Italian civilizing mission in Africa, which – especially in the fascist era – consciously invoked the legacy of ancient Roman Empire building in North Africa.

The Garesa Museum clearly served such instrumental ends, inscribing European artistic values on its African subjects and projecting an image of cultural benevolence for its European visitors. Just as significant, for our purposes, was the Garesa's contribution to an emerging understanding of Somalia's history, both through the selection of artifacts which its organizers chose to exhibit and through the narrative which informed their presentation. There seems little question that the Museum, with its library annex and historical archive, was intended to provide a visual record of Italian exploration, trade, and conquest in Somalia. Glass cases in one of the interior rooms contained original letters and agreements between Somali merchants and the earliest Italian explorers and administrators on the coast (1890s–1910s), along with samples of proclamations freeing slaves under the influence of Italian abolitionist decrees. There were also treaties of protection and trade and some curios from the period of the Italian military occupation of Somalia (1896–1920s). These documents of course worked to demonstrate Italy's contribution to the abolition of slavery and its success at bringing Somalia into the European commercial orbit.

At the same time, the Garesa's galleries gave prominent space to displays of Arabic manuscripts and artifacts from the old towns of the southern Somali (Benaadir) coast. For example, along the inner wall of a colonnade in the Museum's courtyard were hung some twenty limestone fragments

in Elizabethville (Musée national de Lubumbashi), Belgian Congo (1931–1961)', *History and Anthropology*, 25.1 (2014), 72–101. For imperial museums more generally, see Sarah Longair and John McAleer, *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

with Arabic inscriptions – some originals and some plaster copies – from mosque decorations and Islamic burial markers which the Italians had found in Mogadishu's ancient ruins. The earliest dated to 1228 (625 Hijra), others from the fourteenth century.⁷ Along with other relics of a sophisticated urban culture – coinage, imported glass and ceramics, exquisitely carved wooden trunks and window frames – these artifacts gave evidence, in the words of Caroselli, of an 'ancient reality, indeed more ancient than what has been thought up to now'.⁸

As if to highlight that 'ancient reality', the Museum's entry hall displayed a reproduction of an ancient Egyptian bas-relief depicting a Middle Kingdom expedition to the 'Land of Punt' – almost certainly northern Somalia – to gather frankincense and myrrh. For Caroselli, funeral epigraphs dating from the seventh to tenth centuries demonstrated the existence of 'walled cities permanently occupied by people with an ancient civilization and not simply bivouacs of armies of occupation'. As the catalogue's preface put it, the Museum's purpose was to 'gather up all that which had been dispersed or hidden throughout the extensive territory of Somalia and to be able to give a comprehensive and documented impression of the history of that past'.⁹

Perhaps it was the fascist preoccupation with Roman antiquity that prompted its leaders to look for evidence of similar fallen civilizations in their new Somalia colony. Or perhaps it was an attempt to demonstrate that Italy's modern empire builders had not simply ended up with the most desolate and underdeveloped of Africa's territories during the scramble for Africa, but rather with once flourishing lands which could be revitalized by vigorous fascist enterprise. Whatever the impulse behind the fascist effort to 'gather up all that which had been dispersed or hidden', there is little question that the Garesa's assemblage of historical treasures conveyed

7 These manuscripts and inscriptions also provided early colonial scholars with the opportunity to reconstruct aspects of the early history of Arab settlement and culture on the East African coast. See, e.g., Enrico Cerulli, 'Iscrizioni e documenti arabi per la storia della Somalia', *Rivista degli studi orientali*, vol. 11 (1926), 1–24.

8 Caroselli, 'Prefazione', 3.

9 Caroselli, 'Prefazione', 3.

a particular story of Somalia's past glories and of Italy's inheritance of that legacy.

In the only scholarly article to reflect upon the Garesa's significance for Italy's colonial mission, Francesca Declich contends that the Museum aimed to construct an image of colonial Somalia that highlighted the 'colonial relationship which Italy had established with Somalia and the economic potential that Somalia offered to Italy'. As she notes, many of the documents and artifacts donated to the Museum came from members of the Istituto coloniale fascista [Fascist Colonial Institute], which represented Italians who resided in the colony. 'By attaching their names to the artifacts they contributed, the donors would be remembered in history as having participated in constructing something considered to be a work of civilization, a museum'.¹⁰ As noted above, the Garesa itself had been built in the 1870s and served as the residence for the Sultan of Zanzibar's *wali* along the southern Somali coast. In fact, a photograph of the last *wali* appeared on the first page of the reproductions in the Museum's catalogue. Having transformed the former palace into a colonial museum, the Italian authorities seemed to be asserting their succession to the place and prestige of the fabled Omani governors of the city.

At the same time, some half dozen rooms in the Garesa contained displays of farming implements, weapons, pottery, basketry, jewellery and woodcarvings from the Somali countryside. For Declich, the display of these craft items without specific attribution conveyed the image of an 'undifferentiated and homogenous' rural mass of Somalis, who in her view were set apart from the urbane and literate merchant classes of the towns. Declich concludes that the Italian construction of Somali reality via the exhibits in the Garesa clearly privileged the culture of its coastal urban residents. For instance, while the Museum reproduced an entire bedroom of a wealthy Arab merchant family (complete with a finely carved wooden linen chest from Brava, a bed and canopy in Zanzibar style, and a pounded copper

10 Francesca Declich, 'Il museo coloniale della Garesa', in Nicola Labanca, ed., *L'Africa in vetrina. Per una storia dei musei e delle esposizioni coloniali in Italia* (Rovereto: Editoriale Pegus, 1991), 147.

vase from Mecca), 'farmers and pastoralists in contrast get included in a single category', their artifacts undated and their provenance rarely noted.

The dualistic image of the local population presented in the Garesa Museum is singularly different [from that typically projected, for example, in French colonial writings]. The group which constitutes the *outsider* ... is without doubt the entire rural world; one notices, however, a somewhat curious tendency of the curators to identify with the refined and exotic representation of the Arab world rather than to present a model of Italian culture and order.¹¹

Because Italian national unity itself preceded the colonial adventure by only a few decades, an Arab-Islamic model of order and civilization as the counterpoint to the unruly rural masses may have seemed more appropriate to the curators. In any case, Declich suggests that the Italians used the Museum to publicly legitimize a system of social stratification useful to their own commercial colonial politics, which depended on the support of the urban merchant classes and the literate Islamic *qadis*.

Ethnographic Research in the Service of Imperial Expansion

During the very years when the Garesa was being renovated to serve as a colonial showcase, a more secretive imperial project was underway. In August 1932, the government of Somalia issued an Official Circular titled *Direttive per l'Oltre Confine* [Guidelines for the Frontier Regions]. It was classified as *segreta* [secret] and only 150 numbered copies were printed.¹² The Circular was intended for district administrators posted at or near the long-contested border with Ethiopia – a provisional military boundary had been drawn up in 1905 but was never officially recognized by either

11 Declich, 'Il museo coloniale della Garesa', 159.

12 I was kindly given a copy of this unusual document in 1976 by Dr Michele Pirone, a former administrator and educator who had served in Somalia from the 1930s until 1974, when he retired to Rome.

Ethiopia or Italy – and its aims were spelled out with only the slightest circumspection in the preface: 'Various circumstances have necessitated that the political action of the government of Somalia be extended beyond the frontiers of territorial control even into the neighbouring regions in order to undertake the work of political persuasion and policing'. Among the 'various circumstances' detailed in the Directives was the presence of inhabitants in the frontier regions who belonged to the Somali *ceppo* [family] and who enjoyed 'continuing relations and interactions' with clans living under Italian control. In the document's words, 'a centripetal force pushes these populations to gravitate toward the major Somali nucleus which belongs to Italy'. A second 'circumstance' prompting colonial action was the enduring reality of 'nomadism', which made the population oblivious to any delimitation of formal frontiers as they searched for water and pasture essential to their livelihoods. A third circumstance requiring aggressive surveillance of the frontier was that the indeterminateness of the border made numerous frontier populations subject to no formal territorial jurisdiction under international law.

Then, rather ominously, the circular states that in order to prepare for any future eventualities, the government needed to

undertake toward the people who inhabit these regions and who are not securely under our sovereignty an intense action aimed at maintaining their political compactness, by eliminating the reasons for conflict; that is, an action of policing the frontier and in addition an action of prestige and of attraction to sustain and increase in them the conviction that their true interest lies in coming under the sovereignty of Italy and of enjoying the benefits/blessings of a just and organized government: attributes which certainly cannot be recognized in the actions which the Ethiopian state has undertaken toward the peoples in its southern regions.

It further notes that the indeterminacy of the borders needed to be addressed on the basis of 'ethnic' more than 'geographic' criteria, and that it was therefore necessary to prepare the ground for the eventual demarcation of the frontier 'by reconstituting the normal ethnic movements, that is by returning the populations to those territories from which they had dispersed under

the pressure of Amharic invasions and [Somali] dervishism'.¹³ Therefore 'the action of the government ought to project itself even [to districts] where its direct dominion does not reach'.

There is hardly a need to demonstrate the imperialistic intentions of this policy directive. It is not merely hindsight that enables historians to see fascist expansion at work: as noted above, the steady buildup of colonial armed forces with local Somali (and Eritrean) conscripts, the conscription of Somali labourers to build roads to the Ethiopian border, and the growth of border patrols through the late 1920s and early 1930s persuaded several contemporary observers that Italy was about to embark on an expansionist campaign with Ethiopia as its objective.

What is interesting about the 1932 *Directive* is the effort by the fascist authorities to provide an ethnographic and historical rationale for their territorial ambitions. The last sentence of the Directive's preface says 'Since such action presupposes a political-diplomatic context and an ethnic reality, it is necessary to specify with precision the elements of both, in a way that our politics will have sound foundations and precise rules of conduct'. The sound foundation was necessary to persuade sceptical Italians at home and suspicious observers abroad that Italy was operating in the interest of Somali ethnic cohesion and economic rationality. It is also clear that Italian officials sought to 'persuade' Somalis that their interests could best be served by supporting the cause of a territorially unified Horn of Africa, under Italian auspices. In the covert buildup to the 1935 invasion, the fascist state engaged in a systematic effort to collect local oral traditions with the explicit purpose of justifying Italian claims to jurisdiction over the Somali populations living within Ethiopia. These claims were then deployed to help mobilize Somalis for participation in the military campaign that followed.

However patent the imperialistic objectives of the project to collect on-the-ground knowledge of the Somali borderland populations and their seasonal movements, they were oddly consistent with the wider fascist historical project in Somalia. The Directive came out in the same year that

13 The latter refers to the population displacements resulting from the 'Mad Mullah's' twenty-one-year military campaign to resist foreign occupation of the Somali territories.

plans to renovate the Garesa were announced. That building, as we have seen, was slated to house a Museum of Somalia that would 'gather up all that which had been dispersed or hidden in the vast territory of Somalia'. There is a striking parallel in the directive to frontier administrators to gather up the traditions of those Somali clans which were dispersed across the border with Ethiopia. In both instances, imperial policies claimed to be assembling historical evidence (be it oral or material) which would demonstrate that (Fascist) Italy understood and was in the best position to 'restore' and 'protect' the integrity of their Somali wards. It is somewhat ironic that the only systematic collection of oral traditions from the Somali clans in Ethiopia during the colonial era comes from this era of fascist propaganda and territorial expansion.

The Aftermath

The collapse of Italian imperial rule in the Horn in 1941 did not bring an end to the quest for Somali unification across the territorial boundaries which divided them. Most of the major Somali political parties formed in the post-war years to demand independence included in their platforms an expression of support for a single Somali state incorporating all the Somali territories. And every subsequent Somali government—from the transitional leadership of the Trusteeship years (1950–1960) through the parliamentary era (1960–1969) to the authoritarian regime of Mohamed Siyad Barre (1969–1991) publicly committed itself to the goal of one Somali nation, employing many of the same arguments for 'restoration' and 'recovery' that fascist propagandists had advanced. That a concept rooted in imperial ambitions could live on in post-imperial circumstances attests to its emotive power.

Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 and the prolonged civil wars which followed, the pan-Somali narrative has been replaced in academic circles and popular discourse by calls for decentralized federalism or by versions of history which support narrower clan or regional agendas.

Apart from a few dedicated nationalists, calls for a greater Somalia under a single government are most often heard nowadays from Islamist movements which seek to establish an Islamic state over the entire Horn of Africa. To counter Islamist appeals, Ethiopia has begun to promote 'development' in its Somali Region in efforts to win the loyalties of its Somali citizens. Western governments may continue rhetorically to support the central government headquartered in Mogadishu, but privately many acknowledge that the half dozen autonomous regional states which have emerged enjoy greater legitimacy in the eyes of most Somalis who reside in them. The vision of a 'Greater Somalia' – promoted first by the fascist regime in the 1930s and subsequently appropriated by three generations of Somali nationalists starting after the Second World War – has now been replaced by a fragmented nationalism which has effectively blocked the restoration of a unitary state.

As for the Garesa Museum, most of its collections were transferred to a new and modern Museum of Somali Culture which opened in 1987 on Hawo Tako square across from the Somali National Theater. In keeping with the cultural politics of the time, the new National Museum added several large galleries documenting the history of Somali resistance to Western imperialism and culminating with an exhibition of posters and portraits illustrating the 'glorious' era of Mohamed Siyad Barre and the achievements of his 'scientific socialist revolution'. By bringing in some of the older artifacts from the Garesa, however, one might argue that the Siyad Barre regime sought to appropriate a part of the earlier narrative of Somalia's history and incorporate it into its own story, just as the Italians had done with the earlier records of Arab influence on the coast.

During Mogadishu's descent into civil war in 1991 following the ouster of Mohamed Siyad Barre, both the venerable Garesa and the new National Museum, along with many state-sponsored public monuments, were sacked by bands of armed militiamen supporting various clan warlords. On the surface, these appear as simple acts of vandalism by undisciplined rural recruits who took the opportunity to seize booty and artifacts from the capital city to sell for cash. But the sacking of the museums might also be read as a symbolic act directed not only against the public legacy of ex-dictator Mohamed Siyad Barre, but also against an urban culture represented and

reproduced in the museums' holdings. Both the Italian colonizers and the Siyad regime had used museum exhibits to insert themselves into the narrative of Somalia's progress. Their political domination drew at least in part on the tacit support of the merchant classes of Mogadishu, with whom they shared a commitment to urban order and commercial prosperity. To the extent that the Garesa Museum represented the cultural patrimony of the urban elites, might we interpret these acts of vandalism as assaults by rurally based 'have-nots' on the symbols of urban wealth and conspicuous consumption? In some sense, the vandals had destroyed in one blow the remnants of fascist cultural imperialism and of the modern dictatorship, not only painting Governor De Vecchi and President Siyad Barre with the same brush but also lashing out at the privileged cosmopolitanism of those urban elites whose support had helped prop up both regimes.

In what may be a final irony, one hears that it was an Islamist charitable organization – driven no doubt by its own vision of a future Somali polity – which first took up the task of recovering some of the scattered Garesa treasures, including manuscripts and rare books, which had been looted and sold to private collectors throughout East Africa. Far from rejecting the old objects and artifacts, these new collectors seemed eager to portray themselves as responsible conservers of Somalia's cultural heritage. After all, even agents of change seek to demonstrate that history is on their side.

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PART II

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PART II

Postcolonialism

4 Urbanism: History, Legacy, and Memory of the Italian Occupation in Addis Ababa (1936–1941)

Urbanism, the development and planning of cities and towns and the way of life that characterizes them, has had a long history and existence in the Horn of Africa. The antiquity of urbanization in the region is confirmed by the existence of a network of towns and cities particularly Aksum, which was the name of Ethiopia's most famous kingdom and its capital founded approximately 200 years BCE.¹ The establishment of Mogadishu, which is connected to the activities of traders – Arabs and Persians in particular – from across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, is often traced to the tenth century.² The city flourished in the following centuries thanks to its strategic location in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean world. It became the seat of Italian Somalia and became a place of considerable urban planning and constructions soon after they bought the port city from the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1905. The foundation of Asmara goes back to the twelfth century.³ References to the city are found in several sources, including Ethiopian chronicles and the writings of foreign travelers and

1 Rodolfo Fattovich, 'The Development of Ancient States in the Northern Horn of Africa, c. 3000 BC – AD 1000: An Archaeological Outline', *Journal of World History*, 23.3 (2010), 145–175. See also David W. Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilization: Aksum & the Northern Horn 1000 BC – AD 1300* (Oxford: James Currey, 2012).

2 Ahmed Dualah Jama, *The Origins and Development of Mogadishu: AD 1000 to 1850* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1996); Neville Chittick, 'Medieval Mogadishu', *Paideuma*, 28 (1982), 45–62.

3 Edward Denison, Guang Yu Ren and Naigzy Gebremedhin, *Asmara: Africa's Secret Modernist City* (London: Merrell, 2003).

missionaries such as Remedius Prutky in 1751.⁴ Its importance increased when Ras Alula, governor of the area, founded a market there in 1881 and made it his seat of power three years later. Asmara's elevation as capital of the Italian colony of Eritrea in 1897 changed its history.

This chapter explores the history, legacy, and memory of Italian presence in Addis Abäba, the capital of Italian East Africa (1936–1941). Although the Italian occupation of the city, founded in 1886, lasted only four years, an analysis of colonial urban interventions in the city demonstrates the depth of the Italian impact and the presence of ideological traits of colonial urbanism, including the racialization of urban space and a concentration, albeit modest, of modernist architecture. This chapter shows how urban planning reflects and puts into practice colonial ideology, and how colonized people view the colonial project in the postcolonial time.

The Occupation

On 3 October 1935, Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia. The war and the occupation changed the shape of the capital, Addis Abäba, in at least two ways. One was the city's emergence, in both symbolic and material terms, as a crucial site in the war and during the resistance.⁵ In fact, Addis Abäba's iconic significance was such that its liberation, almost five years later, was seen by some, notably the republican movement based in the Sudan, not just as the end of colonial occupation but also the beginning of a new era for the country. The other was its evolution, albeit incomplete, as a 'colonial city' during the occupation.⁶

- 4 On Prutky's visit, see J. H. Arrowsmith-Brown, ed., *Prutky's Travels in Ethiopia and Other Countries* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1991).
- 5 Mogäs Bäyan, *Gizena Polis: 1933–1936 E.C.* (Addis Ababa: 1963 E.C.), 147.
- 6 Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1885–1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 175–176.

As a 'war city', Addis Abäba saw chaos and destruction, frequently after and on the eve of its conquest by Marshall Pietro Badoglio's forces on 5 May 1936. In fact, 3–5 May 1936 could justifiably be considered as the days that shook the city. These were the days in which, in the words of Bahru Zewde, 'the city was caught in the grip of mass violence ... combining elements of mass psychosis and inchoate class warfare, of despair and defiance'.⁷ This is a reference to the indiscriminate destruction Ethiopians wrought on the city, mostly on the rich and the expatriates but also on symbols of the ruling establishment, such as the palace.

The period that followed the Ethiopian defeat, brief as it was, did not fundamentally transform Addis Abäba's social and physical landscape. Nevertheless, it brought its own urban philosophy and practices. Three issues organized the 'urban policy' of the Italian colonial regime: domination, legitimation, and extraction. Stabilizing the city became a priority for the Italians as resistance to the occupation was widespread in the city and its surroundings following the conquest, especially after the offensive of the Ethiopian resistance in July 1936⁸ and after the Graziani Massacre unleashed on 19 February 1937.⁹

In the subsequent months, therefore, Marshall Pietro Badoglio, the new governor of Italian East Africa, began imposing a new colonial regime of security, control, and order. It included disarming the local population, in particular members of the city police. It also involved entrusting the security of the city to the Colonial Police, the Security, but more importantly the Black Shirts – members of the Fascist Party involved in the February Massacre – and the Carabinieri.¹⁰ The latter and three other divisions¹¹ –

- 7 Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 160.
- 8 Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997), p. 324.
- 9 Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 170–171.
- 10 Pietro Badoglio, *The War in Abyssinia* (London: Methuen Publishers, 1937), 164; Fanos Ayele, 'Aspects of Daily Life in Addis Ababa During the Italian Occupation: 1936–1941', BA thesis in History (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1980), 7.
- 11 Banda Addis Ababa, *Banda Erer*, and *Banda Wello* (all named after local places). Lakew Yizengaw, 'The History of Modern Ethiopian Police Force (1900–1941)', BA thesis in History (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, 1973), 39–44; Eshetu

about a thousand men based in the capital – were given sweeping powers and responsibilities over broad matters of urban security, ranging from the suppression of anti-colonial activities to the supervision of public hygiene and urban traffic.¹² They gave a clearly military character to the administrative regime in the city and in the country at large, at least during particular episodes in its history as when resistance was most intense.

However, occupying was not the same as governing. The Italian military victory did not engender the legitimization of Italian power. Building a stable or functioning colonial order required maintaining and restoring as much as dismantling and remaking. On the one hand, Italians established separate administration for the Ethiopians; the recruitment of local collaborators, Eritreans and Ethiopians, pejoratively called *bandas*; and the use of existing municipal structures in the governing of the city. This could be explained both as the result of political expediency and sheer administrative pragmatism, resulting from the recognition of the difficulties of administering an occupied population. The latter resulted from the shortage of Italian colonial personnel, their ignorance of the language and local ethos of administration in the city, and hostility and resistance from the local population.

On the other hand, the occupation represented a rupture which the colonial regime worked to entrench. This meant reinventing Addis Abāba as the capital of a colonial empire – Italian East Africa – changing in the process its social and spatial landscape, and erecting an infrastructure of colonial administration. Italians created a segregated city, but practices of ‘transgressions’ in the realms of administration or social life – such as the rampancy of miscegenation – often occurred, especially since 1936. The colonial regime in the capital and other major towns was in fact associated with the legalization and spread of prostitution. This practice was a cultural taboo in the country, although in existence in pre-Italian times. The municipality provided permits for local and foreign prostitutes, created spaces of prostitution, legalized brothels, and established clinics and a

Hassen, ‘History of the Municipality of Addis Ababa, 1910–1941’, BA thesis in History (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1986), 54.

12 Mogās, *Gizena Polis*, pp. 149–150; Eshetu, ‘History of the Municipality’, 54.

sanatorium for the treatment of STD patients.¹³ Administrative examples include the establishment, in 1936, of a Native Office for the dispensation of local justice by local judges¹⁴ and the Political Office for dealing with local political issues.¹⁵ This purpose was also evident when the colonial regime undertook the plan to reconstitute the Addis Ababa Municipality under a different leadership, namely Carlo Boidi¹⁶ as mayor and Rozario,¹⁷ an Ethiopian from Eritrea, as director-general.

In fact, two categories of offices and practices – one reestablished and the other introduced – could serve to symbolize the tension and subversion involved in the colonial mediation of Addis Ababa’s imperial past and its ‘colonial’ present. The first was the Cadaster Office, under Engineer Toselli and *Ato* Säyfu Yinäsū, both former employees of the municipality, as director and assistant respectively¹⁸ whereas the second was the Town Planning, a novel institution entrusted with the task of signifying colonial power. The first represented an Italian attempt to disestablish the material foundations of the imperial regime through confiscation of property and redistribution of land. The latter, symbolized by the master plans it produced and the racialization that organized the whole undertaking, was constitutive of the larger project of colonizing the city. All the plans that were subsequently developed were unified by an important idea: the racialization and ethnicization of social and spatial landscapes in the capital. The result was the emergence of two different, if not completely distinct, settlements – *Quartiere Nazionale* for the Europeans/Italians and *Quartiere Indigeno* for the local population.¹⁹ The plans were made almost exclusively by Italians, beginning with Cesare Valle and Ignazio Guidi, respectively

13 Richard Pankhurst, ‘The History of Prostitution in Ethiopia’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 12.2 (1974), 176, 178.

14 Eshetu, ‘History of the Municipality’, 51.

15 Eshetu, ‘History of the Municipality’, 53.

16 Addis Ababa Municipality, ስለ አዲስ አበባ ማዘጋጃ ቤት የዋረባ ሪፖርት (‘A Report Presented on the Addis Ababa Municipality’), Addis Ababa, n.d., 3.

17 Eshetu, ‘History of the Municipality’, 47.

18 Eshetu, ‘History of the Municipality’, 47.

19 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana* (Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938), 477.

an engineer and an architect.²⁰ After 1937, the number of people working in the Department of Town Planning grew to over thirty engineers and architects.²¹

Issues of legitimacy and governing further expanded the reaches of Italy's colonial urban regime in the capital. One of such areas was municipal intervention in the provision of social amenities. The idea of service provision or the municipalization of the process had started in the city before the war, but only at very elementary levels. The Italian administration of the city tried to expand and institutionalize the practice, although this did not happen until long after the occupation. At the time, though, it meant developing relevant institutions and investing more resources. A case in point is the founding in 1936 of the Department of Water Services under engineer Branco.²²

Italy's enduring legacy was its drive to remake Addis Abāba as a symbol of colonial power and modernity. These involved efforts to reorganize the spatial and social fabric of the city along the lines of race and ethnicity, by creating spaces of segregation between white and black, and dividing the local population and subsequently their settlements based on their ethnic affiliations. The process also entailed restructuring the spaces of the city based on Western conception of colonial urban modernity. The Italians started, but did not complete, building the outlines of this racialized colonial urban modernity. They founded settlements for the local population and for the European community. They introduced Italian colonial architectural styles and even produced building features using local resources.

Italian influence extended beyond the physical into the social spaces of the city of which prostitution, mentioned earlier, was a major one. However, all these planning, architectural, and social interventions were not deep enough to destroy pre-existing customs and practices of organization or to implant new ones. The city that the Italians left four years after their occupation was changed by the conquest and the urbanistic investment

20 Haile Selassie Gebre Egziabeher, 'A Historical Development of Casa Incis Sāfār', BA thesis in History (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1984), 21.

21 Eshetu, 'History of the Municipality', 49.

22 Eshetu, 'History of the Municipality', 50.

that came with it, but it remained fundamentally traditional notwithstanding. It was a city with layers of cultural influences and of social tensions. These features of the city would intensify in the post-occupation period.

The Making of a 'Colonial' Capital: Addis Ababa, 1936–1941

Despite the briefness of the Italian occupation, the weight of the Italian impact in sectors such as urban planning and architecture, was extensive. Urban colonialism in fact constituted one of the two, and more successful, aspect of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia, the other being agricultural colonization.²³ The intensity and spread of Ethiopian resistance, especially in the countryside, precluded large scale Italian settlement and cultivation while practically confining Italian rule and its impact to the few urban centres in the country. These were the areas whose built environment witnessed restructuring in the following three to four years of the occupation.

In Ethiopia, as in other colonized spaces, the ideological underpinning for the colonial enterprise was rooted in the belief in the existence of fundamental racial differences between the colonizer and the colonized. This understanding organized Italy's civilizing mission²⁴ in Ethiopia but also its plans for a separate development of the two communities. Segregation, both social and spatial, was aimed at separating levels of developments, protecting racial purity as well as the aesthetic and hygienic concerns of the colonial masters. It was also needed to enhance the visibility, mobility and presence of the colonists and the colonial state while making colonial subjects observable and controllable as they were simultaneously rendered

23 Mia Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are: Fascist Plans for the Colonial City of Addis Ababa and the Colonizing Suburb of EUR '42', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.2 (April 1996), 400.

24 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 400.

invisible and powerless.²⁵ This in fact was the essence of Italian colonial urbanism and urban planning as the following quotations affirms: 'The realization of the native city shall be a superb affirmation of the racial policy which permeates the life of the Empire, for our quarters will teach the natives to lead their lives under the influence of ours but strictly separated from them'.²⁶

Fulfilling this objective involved two steps: a contradictory process of dehistoricizing Ethiopia (and its capital) while simultaneously proclaiming it as a special colonial prize. This apparent contradiction and ambivalence in the treatment of Ethiopia as both barbaric and half-civilized emanates from at least two sources: Europe's recognition, albeit reluctantly, of the antiquity and grandness of its history and civilization; and Italy's disastrous defeat in 1896, a loss with enduring racial and anti-colonial symbolisms as a victory of blacks over whites. The obliteration and subsequent construction of Addis Abāba (and Ethiopia at large) anew was not just discursive but also material, which entailed the spatial and social reorganization of the city and its Ethiopian residents. The first comprised substantial demolition of parts of the city deemed un-civilized while the latter required the 'culturing' of the city's occupants.

To Italian colonial officials and urban planners, Ethiopia, but more palpably, Addis Ababa, a fifty-year-old city by 1936, was the typical Other representing all that was not Italian/European: a country without an urban tradition, a city without order and spatial discipline, and people lacking or incapable of organization.²⁷ Addis Ababa was 'the true Negro city, that is, the unhappy result of the incapacity that blacks on the whole and Ethiopians

25 See Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) and Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development, Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London and Boston, MA: Routledge, 1976).

26 Édouard Berlan, *Addis-Abeba. La plus haute ville d'Afrique* (Grenoble: Allier, 1963), 375. An almost similar policy was expounded and justification was given for separating the colonists and the colonized in Italian Somalia. See Alberto Arecchi, 'Mogadishu', *Cities*, 1.3 (1984), 224.

27 Gherardo Bosio, 'Future città dell'Impero', *Architettura*, 16.2 (1937), 422; Ignazio Guidi and Cesare Valle, 'Programma urbanistico per Addis Abeba', *Architettura*, 16.2 (1937), 755.

especially have for [organization]'.²⁸ It was a city born of a 'disorganized and confused mentality'.²⁹ The logic of the discourse was that as the city had nothing or little of value needing restoration or preservation, everything including native lives and the built environment could be demolished and constructed anew: 'There is therefore nothing other than a land waiting to be cultivated along with our will.... There must not be any civilization but our own.... There cannot be any city planning or any architecture but ours'.³⁰

The end objective of Italy's planning and architectural colonialism and the embodiment of its new urbanism,³¹ was the building, through the instrumentality of a 'blank-slate planning',³² of a new city or an urban system, with a new social and spatial order, with segregated settlements (named 'centre' and 'quarter') and separate life styles for metropolitans and the 'natives' of the city. Separation which was social and spatial was also essentialized using natural barriers as physical boundaries such as riverbeds, hills and vegetation.³³ This is in line with the fascist policy of endlessly fragmenting the local population along ethnic and religious lines. The rationale for this was to eliminate any chance for resistance as well as to ensure the governability of the conquered population. This was expected in the absence of a semblance of acceptance and a chronic shortage of colonial personnel.

Four plans were prepared, at times without any site data but all intending to redesign a city almost anew. The first was in 1936 by Ignazio Guidi and Cesare Valle; the second in 1937 by the government's Technical Office; the third approved in March 1938 and the fourth completed in October 1938,

28 Guidi and Valle, p. 755, quoted in Fuller, 'Building Power: Italy's Colonial Architecture and Urbanism 1923-1940', *Cultural Anthropology*, 3.4 (1988), 481.

29 Fuller, 'Building Power', 481.

30 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 403.

31 Fasil Ghiorgis and Denis Gerard, *The City and Its Architectural Heritage: Addis Ababa 1886-1941* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2007), 148.

32 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 403.

33 Guidi and Valle, 'Programma urbanistico per Addis Abeba', 760.

both prepared by Guidi and Valle. The final plan was promulgated on 16 January 1939, less than two years before Italy's final withdrawal.³⁴

Discussion of plans for Addis Ababa would not be complete without mentioning the world famous Swiss-French planner, Le Corbusier who used the opportunity to test his radical planning ideas – high density, low ground coverage, and high-tech principles – unrestricted in the spaces of Addis Ababa. At the invitation in 1936 of the fascist leader, Mussolini, he prepared a guideline for a master plan for the city that would subject natural features and topography to imposed forms; respond to colonial concerns for control, order, and strength; and use race and ethnicity to organize the city into segregated neighbourhoods, Europeans in the east (with their 'radiant city') and Ethiopians in the west. Other important elements of his sketch included a highly articulate network of streets to be based on a grand boulevard that would cross the city from north to south; the panoptical nature of the traffic square, near the military headquarters in the centre of the city; and the creation of green areas. However, Le Corbusier never visited the city or had any geographical knowledge of the areas as some of his suggestions, like for an airport on a rugged terrain, clearly demonstrated. He did not have the chance to present his proposal to Mussolini and his ideas for a monumental Italian colonial city in Africa never materialized.³⁵

An important component of these plans was the proposal, partially implemented, to introduce a grid matrix with a series of formal vistas each enclosed by major buildings in the service of the army, administration, and

- 34 See Giuliano Gresleri, 'Architecture for the Towns of the Empire', in *RASSEGNA: Architecture in the Italian Colonies in East Africa*, 51.3, XIV (1992), 36–52.
- 35 Gresleri, 'Architecture for the Towns of the Empire', 112–113; Fasil and Gerard, *The City and Its Architectural Heritage: Addis Ababa 1886–1941*, 146; Techeste Ahderom, 'Basic Planning Principles and Objectives Taken in the Preparation of the Addis Ababa Master Plan: Past and Present', in Ahmed Zekaria, Bahru Zewde and Taddese Beyene, eds, *Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa, November 24–25, 1986* (Addis Ababa, 1987), 249, 251; Dandena Tufa, 'Historical Development of Addis Ababa: Plans and Realities', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 41.1–2 (2008), 32.

business (Addis Kātāma and Märkato),³⁶ and to establish exclusive zones of neighbourhoods and activities including service, commercial (southeast), industrial (southeast), military, and political (south). The centre of the new city would move to the south, the modern National Theatre area. It would be monumental, a sort of a governmental acropolis encompassing all colonial military and civil offices³⁷ and serving the cause of dominance.

The monumentality of the city centre and the modernity and thus Italianness of government offices and residences of civil servants and the military served a political purpose. It massively exhibited the grandeur of Italian power³⁸ and its capacity for control and regulation. These buildings made 'evident the predominance of white over black... the infantile, primitive indigenous population',³⁹ creating among colonial subjects a sense of the omnipresence of Italian power. Impressing Italy's colonial rivals in the region (France in French Somaliland and Britain in British Somaliland, Kenya and the Sudan), this project constituted another thrust of Italy's emerging colonial urbanism.

The European centre, in particular the residential area, to be located in the east and south of the city, would 'have a practical architecture, simple and dignified, rich in frescoes, mosaics and sculptures',⁴⁰ with villas and apartment buildings for upper-class and working-class Italians respectively, schools, sports complexes, markets, hospitals, and hotels.⁴¹ In the west, a quarter for the indigenous population would emerge with a market of its own serving commerce and as a source of entertainment, especially for

- 36 See Tesfaye Beza, 'Historical Development of Addis Ababa', 1987 E.C. (1994/95), a manuscript at the Addis Ababa Master Plan Project Office (hereafter AAMPPO), Addis Ababa City Administration Library, 8.
- 37 C. Rave, 'Costruire in Colonia (parte seconda)', *Domus*, 9 (1936), 29.
- 38 Carlo Enrico Rava, 'Costruire in colonia (parte seconda)', *Domus*, 9 (1936), 29.
- 39 Fuller, 'Building Power', 479.
- 40 Fuller, 'Building Power', 481.
- 41 Gherardo Bosio, 'Progetto di Massima per il Piano Regolatore di Dessie', *Architettura*, 16.2 (1937), 777–785; and his 'Progetto di Massima per il Piano Regolatore di Gimma', *Architettura*, 16.2 (1937), 786–792.

tourists.⁴² There would be little Italian architectural intervention for the objective was not to bring the 'natives' to modern, if not Italian, standards but to let them live according to their own cultural and building traditions.⁴³ The descriptions such a 'native' space was accorded were invariably deprecating; unplanned, rudimentary, monotonous, haphazard, disordered, unhygienic, and diseased.

Cognizant of the environmental and topographical differences and the difficulties of importing construction materials from Italy, contemporary Italian planners and architects – such as Guido Ferraza, Luigi Piccinato, and Cesare Valle – suggested the use of local resources and the designing of houses that suit the conditions of the colony. What eventually emerged however was not a dialectic exchange between local and colonial designs and typologies, although some local building techniques were adopted for low-cost building and working-class houses. The Italians modified their earlier expectations and built structures fitting the colonial environment and useful for the demands of colonial life. Stone masonry, bricks, concrete and corrugated iron sheeting constituted preferred materials for construction.⁴⁴ Verandahs or galleries open or covered with a wooden screen and even courtyards and bungalows, instead of imported models from Italy, were given importance as places of rest and leisure.⁴⁵

Despite being elaborate and ambitious, only less than 20 per cent of the Italian plan was put into effect by 1941, implying that pre-existing structures and forms of the city had survived Italian planning onslaught. For Ethiopians and Italians alike had been building whatever they needed with no restriction at least at the beginning, despite the prohibition to do so.⁴⁶ This would be particularly the case with the 'indigenous quarter', the

42 Guidi and Valle, 'Programma urbanistico per Addis Abeba', 762. The plan represented a reversal of Le Corbusier's earlier sketch, in which the east was designated for the natives and the west for the colonists.

43 Fasil and Gerard, *The City and Its Architectural Heritage: Addis Ababa 1886–1941*, 280.

44 L. Piccinato, 'La Casa in Colonia (parte terza)', *Domus*, 9 (1936), 9.

45 L. Piccinato, 'La Casa in Colonia (parte seconda)', *Domus*, 9 (1936), 16–17, Figure 19.

46 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 403, 405.

part of the city whose construction was almost completed during the short span of Italian administration.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding, traces of Italian investment abound although they were not all products of strict planning and building regulations and Italian presence left its marks in the spaces of the city in several ways. With racial segregation as the governing frame of reference, remaking the city started in 1937 and continued until 1940 leading to the demolition and sequestration of homes and the massive displacement, by decree and force, of thousands of residents of the city, some with compensation, mainly from areas now reserved for the Italians (east and south). By the middle of 1937, the number of those evicted reached more than 10,000, almost a ninth of the city's Ethiopian population, and by the autumn of 1939 the number rose to about 20,000. The plan was to transfer about 100,000 people but had to be abruptly abandoned because of the collapse of the fascist occupation.⁴⁸ Officially, the impounding was justified on grounds of urgent needs for land, and buildings, for public works projects, for roads, for industry, settlement, political and military activities, and planning purposes. The institutions involved to carry out the plan included the Political and Works Office, Political Administrative Office, and Addis Ababa Municipality Office for Technical Services, and religious organizations like Mission Della Consolata in Guläle Säfär.

Two colonial offices, Affari Civili and Servizi Tecnici – one of the Governor of Shewa in which Addis Ababa was located and the other of the Mayor of the capital – were instrumental in this massive undertaking, from setting the regulatory and administrative framework, often modelled

47 Fuller, 'Building Power', 406.

48 See Bahru Zewde, 'Early *Safars* of Addis Ababa: Patterns of Evolution', in Ahmed Zekaria, Bahru Zewde and Taddese Beyene, eds, *Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa, November 24–25, 1986* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1987), 50–51; Richard Pankhurst, 'Developments in Addis Ababa During the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936–1941)', in Ahmad Zekaria, Bahru Zewde and Taddese Beyene, eds, *Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa, November 24–25, 1986* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1987), 127, 131–132; and his 'Fascist Racial Policies in Ethiopia, 1936–1941', *Ethiopia Observer*, 12.4 (1969), 14.

on that in Eritrea,⁴⁹ to enforcing the evacuations and the payment of compensations.⁵⁰ The Addis Ababa Municipality and the Office of the Governor of Shewa mobilized their respective resources to facilitate the commercialization of land in the capital as well as the modernization of the process. This included the use of offices like the Contracts Department; officials (the governor or his deputy of the governorate, heads and secretaries of the Municipality), and technicians such as surveyors (like Geometra Ricci), and engineers (Cibonecale, who was the leading engineer; P. Kalojoro; Giuseppe Tabas). No land sale was made in the absence of legal advisors, agents or witnesses. This was largely uncommon in pre-war Addis Ababa and remained the same for a good part of its post-war history.

The compensations were estimated in lire, the Italian national currency, which Italians claimed to have paid in full,⁵¹ for the properties they had taken, such as land, houses, and small-scale manufacturing establishments like oil pressers and mills. Property owners, including resident foreigners, who were not content with the amount offered or rival claimants to the property thereof could appeal within fifteen days of the announcement to the Addis Ababa Municipality Office of Technical Services.⁵² Compensation for those individually owned plots lost in this way ranged from the highest (767,900 lire for Polidor Zeku, Felwuha *Säfar*; 299,500 for

49 Notices of Compensation Payments by the Governor of Shewa and the Mayor of Addis Ababa, June and August 1938; March, July and August 1939; September and October 1940. One example is the State Law, 17 October 1939, Art. 17, No. 540.

50 National Archives and Library Agency (hereafter NALA), box 2, file 101/11 (Addis Ababa).

51 There are lists of names of land owners and estimates of compensation although there is no definitive indication, at least in the documents I have discovered, if the payments were made. For some informants, and the Italian documents, however, the answer was positive and Ethiopians were recompensed. See the documents in NALA, box 184, file 1 and box 50, file 69/4 (Addis Ababa). Interviews with *Ato* Ayälä Wolde-Mikael, *Ato* Hayle Tafa, *Balambaras* Bälaynäh, and *Woizäro* Nigatua Seyoum.

52 Some of the owners were members of prominent families like *Woizäro* Mulunäs, daughter of *Fitawrari* Habtä Giyorgis (22,175 lire, Guläle *Säfar*) and Yäsäwa Šahay, son of *Lij* Iyasu (103,500 lire, Arada *Säfar*).

Qañazmač Bäyänä Bälaynäh, Entoto *Säfar*; and 223,902 lire for *Bäjerond* Feqerä Selassie Kätäro) to the lowest (48 lire for *Woizäro* Zäwdenäs Bäyänä, *Fitawrari* Habtä Giyorgis *Säfar*).⁵³

In a way, the outbreak of mass violence in the capital and the considerable destruction of lives and property that followed, on the eve of the occupation (2–5 May 1936), and the Graziani Massacre and the subsequent exodus of some of the residents could be said to have aided the eviction. Conversely, it was a boost, if modest, for Italy's quest for a blank-slate planning and building ideology. The 'virgin fantasy' thus created encouraged the drive towards constructing a city and architecture anew.⁵⁴

A new quarter, fittingly called Addis Kätäma [New City] was built in the western part of the city on the land of former Ethiopian proprietors, most notably *Fitawrari* Habtä Giyorgis, with several hundred newly finished model homes, mostly mud huts but some in concrete, to house the evictees. As the houses cost 11,000 lire each, they could only be let to those who could pay, including prostitutes, or were given to prominent collaborators. A practical solution was however to let the people build their own houses, predominantly circular thatch-roofed huts. The government would allocate land freely (from 180 to 300 m² for commoners and 300 to 500 m² for collaborators) and provide a subsidy of 400 lire each to pay for building materials such as poles and nails.⁵⁵ The new settlement was complete with a cinema, piped water, and electricity and paved neighbourhood streets.

53 Compiled from different documents deposited in NALA, box 184, file 1 and box 50, file 69/4 (Addis Ababa).

54 Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are', 403.

55 Shimelis Bonsa [a.k.a. Shimelis Bonsa Gulema], 'Migration, Urbanization, and Urban Labor Undertakings: The Case of the Kistane of Addis Ababa, c. 1900–1974', MA thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1997), 81; Pankhurst, 'Developments in Addis Ababa During the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936–1941)', 132; Amare Kassa, 'The Kistane Community of Addis Ketema', BA thesis in History (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1985), 32. For a contemporary overview, see Konovaloff, 'The Konovaloff Manuscript' (Stanford: The Hoover Institution, n.d.), 250–352.

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The foundation for a new market – today's Märkato – was also laid in 1937.⁵⁶ The Italians built a chain of concrete shops and stores in Italian colonial style; some were given freely to prominent local collaborators and most were rented to favourites: Muslims mainly from Eritrea, Arabs and a few Indians. Several prominent local merchants⁵⁷ were given land instead to build shops which they later rented to Ethiopian (predominantly Harari) and Indian traders.⁵⁸ The open space found in between and around these concrete structures was divided up and allotted for free and at nominal fees to Ethiopians for use as stalls.⁵⁹

The story of foreign, mainly Muslim and Arab acquisition of land in the emerging 'colonial' Addis Ababa deserves particular mention. This group of people certainly represented the second biggest beneficiary, after the Italians, of colonial land grants and sales in the capital. In the process, they, with the Italians, constituted a new urban landowning class. Their ownership outlived Italian colonialism but they were faced with increasing scrutiny and, at times, dispossession by the Ethiopian government. Their urban land proprietorship and the saga of their rags to riches rise was intertwined with the racism of Italian colonialism, the predication of

56 Pankhurst, 'Developments in Addis Ababa During the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936–1941)', 126. However, Salih Ahmed Kekiya, the largest proprietor in the Märkato area, gives a different year, 1938, as the beginning of land allotment. See Kekiya's Letter to Emperor Haylä Səlassə (no date, no Ref. No, but probably written between 1941 and 1942). NALA, box 20, file 101/11 (Addis Ababa).

57 A prominent example was Kekiya from Arqiqo in Eritrea; he built a row of fifty concrete shops and rented forty-five of them to Indian and Ethiopian merchants. Municipality of Addis Ababa Administration (hereafter MAAA), box 27, letter 4733, August 11/44 E.C., from the Land Board prohibiting Salih Ahmed Kekiya from selling or mortgaging his land or shops.

58 MAAA, box 27, letter 4733, August 11/44 E.C. See also MAAA, box 27, letter 123, November 25/45, from the Municipality to the Department of Survey; box 29, letter 2559/37/88, December 15/62, from the Ministry of Pen to the Ministry of Justice.

59 Interviews with Bäke Kärse, Balča Urge, Bākälä Kero, Dānboba Kärse, Gudātu Dägaga, and Wolde Ture gave me oral information about this fact. These individuals were part of the wave of migration to the capital city during the occupation. Some of them eventually became successful merchants.

its policy of divide and rule on racial (anti-black/Ethiopian) and political (anti-Orthodox Christian) grounds.

This group of foreign proprietors of both land and buildings was made up of forty-seven men, invariably merchants – thirty-two with British protection, of which thirteen were apparently of Indian origin, twelve Yemenis, two Ethiopians, and one under French protection. They built structures, which were often used for business and/or for rent, having rooms ranging from the one in number (which was widespread), the fewest, to three buildings each with forty-six, forty-four, and forty-seven rooms respectively, the largest belonging to Usman Ali, a British citizen. The most conspicuous representatives however were the Kekiya brothers, two Muslim Ethiopians from Arqiqo in present-day Eritrea.

One was Usman Kekiya, who built many commercial structures in Märkato (a bakery, a store made of wood with shops around it, four big stores made of stone and used by Banyan (Indian) and Harari textile traders, a two-room shop at Dir Tära, a one-room shop at Bonda Tära, both built in stone, and three rooms in wood). The more prominent one was Salih Ahmäd Kekiya, who was also known by his title Commandatore. In 1938, he bought a huge tract of land, 5 lire per m², partly from the Addis Ababa Municipality (27,794.62 m² for 123,973.10 lire)⁶⁰ and partly from the pre-war landowners (principally the 1,177.25 m² for 4,718 lire from *Woizäro* Altaye Wärq Habté,⁶¹ and 10,723.95 m² for 53,619.75 lire from *Woizäro* Mulunäš, the wife and daughter, respectively, of *Fitawrari* Habtä Giyorgis, the landlord of the entire area).

This spatial development was significant in at least two ways. On the one hand, many members of minorities – including socially and spatially marginalized groups such as smiths, weavers, and potters – for the first time came to have rights of property ownership and security of tenure

60 Land Sale Agreement, on 6 June 1940, between Commandatore Salih Ahmed Kekiya and the Addis Ababa Municipality represented by Dr Tavas Giuseppe, Deputy Mayor (signed by Dr Francesco Cavallaro, head of the Addis Ababa Municipality Contracts Office, on 27 May 1940, No. 12642, and registered on 1 June 1940, No. 2415).

61 593 m² was sold 5 lire a piece for 2,965 lire whereas the remaining 584.25 m² was sold at lower rate for 1,753 lire.

which they were invariably denied before the occupation. This was made possible by the dismantling of the material basis of the Ethiopian land-owning class and the structure of patron-client relations. The symbolism, if not the material reality, of this measure lasted even after the proprietary right of most was revoked in the years after the end of the occupation. On the other hand, the Italian policy of segregation which was racial as well as cultural had the effect of congregating individuals from particular ethnic or religious groups in parts of the city. This was to become one reason for the rise of neighbourhoods with large concentration of people from certain communities. This development, intensified after the end of the conquest, would have enduring implications for the communities as well as for the city. These included decisions and performance regarding economic organization, political participation, and rural-urban ties. The strength or weakness of ethnic and national sentiments is also partly related to the nature of a group's spatial organization.

As for the Italian section of the city, the initial reaction to the shortage of accommodation for an army of soldiers and civilians was to confiscate the big compounds of Ethiopian notables as well as the buildings of foreign firms and communities. However, this was a temporary solution and in subsequent years, the Italians built residential houses for two groups of Italians, upper class and working class.

Despite lack of appropriate skills and building materials, a significant number of apartment blocks, villas, and low cost working-class houses were built in selected areas of the city. The apartments, for instance, 'had one or two storey with different-sized flats ranging from two to five rooms'.⁶² Each had gardens and separate service quarters for servants and other functions. Several such neighbourhoods emerged but prominently two which were named after the companies involved in their development: 'Kazančis', a calque of 'Case INCIS',⁶³ for upper-class Italians and Popolare, a short for 'Istituto Fascista Autonomo delle Case Economiche e Popolare' [Fascist

62 Fasil and Gerard, *The City and Its Architectural Heritage: Addis Ababa 1886-1941*, 160.

63 Istituto Nazionale per le Case degli Impiegati Statali, roughly translated as the Italian National Institute for the Housing of State Employees, was founded in 1924 in Italy. See Fasil and Gerard, 160.

Autonomous Institute for Popular and Economical Houses], for their working-class compatriots.⁶⁴

Another aspect of changing the urban landscape of Addis Ababa was its Italianization – the renaming of its streets, public places and other spaces of importance. Arada – Addis Ababa's pre-war commercial hub – was now called Piazza del Littorio, a name that still identifies this place. Cambolojo – a calque of 'Campo-Alloggio Operai' [Camps-Lodgings for Workers] – originally referred to a quarter for Italian workers, but now denotes the city's only international stadium. Regarding streets, Italian names of royalty and political and military leaders replaced existing Ethiopian counterparts; Corso Vittorio Emanuele was used instead of Mənilək Boulevard (Arat Kilo-Arada), Via Principessa di Piemonte supplanted Entoto Avenue, and Mussolini became the name for the Lagahar-Piazza Avenue.

In the final analysis, however, the city that emerged was reflective more of the spatial and social practices of its Ethiopian subjects than of the designs and plans of its colonial masters. Italians envisaged a colonial city transformed by urban planning and architecture, complete with grid plans, monumental buildings and boulevards, displaying Italian grandeur and its capacity for order, control and regulation. Such a city largely eluded Italian colonial planners and political leaders.⁶⁵ Addis Ababa did not evolve to resemble other cities in colonies with longer and deeper European colonial presence representing the dominance of 'the norms and forms of one mode of production (industrial capitalism)'.⁶⁶ Colonial urbanism had left its significant imprint on the spatial fabric of the capital and other major cities but it had to make situation-specific variations and accommodation of some existing structures, materials and forms of the city for themselves. This led Pankhurst to conclude that 'there can, however, be no gainsaying

64 Haile Selassie Gebre Egziabher, 'A Historical Development of Case Incis (Cazanchis) *Safar* up to 1974', 26.

65 Woubshet Berhane, 'Urban Policies and the Formation of Social and Spatial Patterns in Ethiopia: The Case of Housing in Addis Ababa', PhD dissertation (Oslo: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2002), 118-119.

66 Anthony D. King, *Urbanism, Colonialism and the World-Economy* (London: Routledge, 1990), 9.

that the city, for all its enduring Ethiopian features, had been considerably influenced by the occupation, and was to bear a marked Italian imprint at least at the architectural level for several decades'.⁶⁷

The first refers to recognition of the difficulty of importing every material from Italy, the inappropriateness of models made in Italy due to the colony's different topographical and environmental conditions, and the challenge of undertaking massive and alien planning and building projects. Italian colonial practicality did not however extend to the blending of modern – Italian – and 'traditional' –Ethiopian – planning and architectural traditions, principles, and forms. After all, the policy of segregation permeated every element of the infrastructure of colonial governance, from spatial to social to ideological. The second factor with a more immediate effect was the collapse of Italian occupation in about four years. Intense resistance in the countryside while confining the Italians to the towns and cities – thus indirectly aiding some urban development – eroded and eventually ended their colonial occupation and, with it, the dreams for a colonial empire.

On 6 April 1941, the Italian forces left the city and the country as a whole. This marked the end of the colonial project but the legacy of the conquest continued. For Ethiopia's post-war imperial regime, there were aspects of Italy's urban modernism which it needed to retain and refine – the political use of planning and architecture, for instance – while there were others – such as the racialization of city making – which it had to abandon or expunge. These choices would inform the trajectory of postcolonial urban development in the capital. At the same time, the postcolonial period represents the resurrection of Ethiopia's pre-conquest experiment with modern city-making. The intensification of this undertaking, which now assumed the nature of a 'project', was a consequence of several factors including the imperatives of re/building a modern state-nation and the need to use the capital for its inscription. Both colonial and postcolonial urbanisms were crucial in this development, as the Ethiopian state sought

67 Pankhurst, 'Developments in Addis Ababa During the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936–1941)', 136.

to modernize Addis Ababa without changing the traditional foundations of the city's political economy.

The Legacy of Italian Colonial Planning and Building Practice

The Italian colonial planning represented Ethiopia's first major encounter with a modern planning practice. For the colonizers and their sympathizers, the abrupt demise of the Italian power was equated with the failure of the project of modernity, which colonialism was mediating. For instance, Brian F. Macdonald, who was visiting the city soon after liberation, affirmed that:

Our Italian friends [...] only had some four years to make much out of Addis and they apparently decided that the best thing to do was to leave the old town to its haphazard self and to build instead a new town, of which the old one would form only a part. The most amazing plans had been drawn out and, had the Italians been left alone for long enough, there is little doubt but that they would have produced a very beautiful city, possibly one of the finest, if not the actual finest, in Africa. The setting is there, the climate is there, and the work had commenced on new Government buildings, triumphal avenues, etc., which would have been a credit to Italian art. Now that is all a thing of the past, and *I fear Ethiopia's fine new capital city will never be built*.⁶⁸

By the time of liberation in 1941, therefore, the imperial regime of Haylä Selasse (1930–1975) inherited not just the practice and relics of Italian colonial planning but the ideology of planning as well, with the significant exception of its racial component. For the imperial monarchy, Italian spatial experiments represented both a challenge and an opportunity. The post-conquest modernization of the city therefore meant that there were artifacts of the colonial occupation that needed to be undone as much as

68 Frederick A. Sharf, ed., *Ethiopian in Wartime: 1941–1942, Memoirs Written by Brian Fraser Macdonald* (Hollywood, CA: Tsehai Publishers & Distributors, 2004), 145, emphasis added.

there were others that would be retained and intensified. There are at least two ways of seeing post-war official planning and architectural developments in the capital. One was to interpret those colonial imprints as efforts to continue and to imitate, with some reshaping or changing of names, structures, designs, and objectives. The other, or more important, way was to diminish and if possible erase or negate the planning and architectural memories of the colonial past. This could explain the desire, if not the capacity, to build huge architectural works and restructure the organization of space in post-war Addis Ababa.

The Italian intrusion into the space of the Ethiopian capital city brought a weakening and, in some cases, a dismantling of pre-existing principles and ideology of spatial organization. One such example was the confiscation and redistribution of urban property, principally land, among Italians and their Ethiopian subjects, at the expense of the old propertied class. These developments engendered a short-lived reworking of the political-economy that determined and sustained the infrastructure of spatial organization in the capital. For the new regime beset by the challenges of post-war reconstruction of state and society, these changes could not be maintained and had to be overturned. This meant the return of property, and consequently power and resource, to their pre-war owners, the royal-aristocracy in particular, while extending recognition – limited and politically dictated – to some members of the new group of property owners that the Italians had created.

At the same time, Italian colonial planning represented opportunities in at least two ways. First, it left behind many colonial planning and architectural traces, like new settlements and new buildings, which could be put to use rather than simply dismantled in the pursuit of a symbolic rupture with the colonial past. Second, it demonstrated the uses of planning, particularly in building and signifying state order, control, legitimacy, and domination. The history of post-war planning in the capital showed how urban planning was put in the service of post-war reconstruction; the constitution of a modern and national urban space, which itself was political, but also the creation, reflection, and reinforcement of a new post-war social and political order.

Confronting the 'Colonial' Past: Remembering, Forgetting, and Beyond

It is almost seventy-six years since Italy's colonial adventure in Ethiopia had come to a crashing end but the memory, history and representation of the encounter have been anything but consistent and complete. What we observe instead is 'knowledge coexisting with obscurantism, acknowledgement with forgetfulness' in both the public memory and scholarship of the Italian occupation and its legacies in Ethiopia. The major reason was that the defeat and occupation of Ethiopia occurred at a critical moment during the making of a modern nation and national identity. The experience represented a subversion of Ethiopia's narrative of difference and exceptionalism and a threat to the process of nation building. This was further complicated by fractures in the way the Italian aggression was accounted for, between an official and hegemonic memory of sacrifice and patriotism on the one hand and a counter-memory of collaboration and 'liberation', which was subaltern and oppositional, on the other.

Therefore, there is no consensus on how the period is or should be remembered although two strands can generally be identified. The first seeks to preserve Italy's 'colonial' past in Ethiopia as a history *irrelevant* to the present while seeking its *erasure*, though incomplete or imperfect, from public and historical consciousness.⁶⁹ It has not been successful. The second thread, on the contrary, aims to conceive and remember the Italian past as an 'artefact' usable and relevant to the present. This past therefore is not destroyed but reframed, repaired, cleaned up, and selectively appropriated, as material fragments rather than as a system. Such an understanding of the past legitimates the monumental representation of the war and resistance although this monumentalization is based on a simultaneous denial and utilization of the occupation. Celebration of the period (1935–1941)

69 Madeleine Yue Dong, 'Defining Beijing: Urban Reconstruction and National Identity, 1928–1936', in Joseph W. Escherick, ed., *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 138.

as Ethiopia's great national victory, in the tradition of Adwa but at times even surpassing it,⁷⁰ takes place, albeit tensely, alongside the memory of the years as a moment of national humiliation.

Two objectives are served. One is the construction and nationalization of a memory, as part of a 'nationalist mythology',⁷¹ by insisting on a single message (the patriotism and sacrifice of Ethiopians but also the antiquity and continuity of Ethiopian history) through celebrations, history lessons, and cultural productions, all in the service of fostering nationhood and a national community.⁷² Certain battle sites were therefore monumentalized, specific figures were selected to be celebrated, and a calendar of national holidays was established. Such monumentalization and memorialization, symbolized by the Yäkatit 12 Monument (dedicated to the victims of the Graziani Massacre on 19 February 1937) and the Victory Monument (in honour of the return of the emperor and of independence on 5 May 1941), constituted an attempt to centralize and systematize memory. This flagging, even banalizing, of such a historical memory (which entails the concealment of other memories) advances a political project pursued consistently by Ethiopia's post-war regimes although they differed in ideology and interpretations of history and identity. However, it is also true that Ethiopia's 'republican' regimes' fixation on rupture with the country's imperial past tended to discourage critical reflection and conversation on the occupation and the nature of Ethiopian resistance.

The other objective refers to benefits gained by a critical appropriation of a Western practice and ideology, whether this comes in the form of urban planning or architecture or the rationalization of the state. An example is the attempt to reorganize and modernize urban space, especially the capital, in order to reconstitute the power of the state and its fundamentally

authoritarian power structure. Planning, for instance, became the medium to inscribe this political objective on the spaces of the city and the production, in the process, of a material reality of hegemony. Building, at times monumental, also served this purpose.⁷³ The imperial regime (1941–1975) adopted aspects of the Italian past to create and reorder the social and spatial landscape of the nation's capital and its other major cities. Its successors (since 1975), despite their ideological reorientation to the East, continued a tradition of dependence on the West and Western modernity.

Both threads outlined above, therefore, show that a systematic and coherent remembering and interpretation of the period is difficult. Several factors are involved including political expediency; the disruption of the narrative of 'Ethiopian exceptionalism'; the brutality of the occupation; and the presence of fractured memories. The first two tended to generate a remembering that is reluctant or highly selective. In a country where the idea of independence and a heroic, even martyrological, leadership is sacralized, a search for some form of 'selective national memory' or a political or politicized regulation of how the defeat and occupation is narrated instead of a critical reflection and interrogation of what went wrong, has become the preferred response to the humiliation of defeat and occupation, not to mention the 'flight' of the emperor, something unprecedented in the long and proud history of the country. Foreign policy considerations since liberation, principally the need to normalize relations with Italy and Europe, was another reason used to justify a softening of a remembering of the occupation. Interestingly, this ambivalence about the past – what to remember and forget and how – is also paralleled by Italy's traumatic postcolonial experience: a refusal, even denial, to acknowledge its brutal colonial past while trying, albeit timidly, to confront it.⁷⁴

70 Biniam Weldegebriel, 'Memories of the Victory of Adwa: A Focus on its Commemoration (1941–1999)', MA thesis (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2004), 33.

71 Charles McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War', *Northeast African Studies*, 3.1 (1996), 66.

72 Zelealem Banti, 'The Theme of Italian Occupation in Major Amharic Novels and Plays', MA thesis (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1990).

73 An important example is the works of Arturo Mezzedemi, an Italian architect who was credited for over a 1,000 building projects in an illustrious career spanning forty years in Ethiopia and present-day Eritrea. His most famous architectural creations include the Addis Ababa City Hall, whose construction began in 1961 and was completed in 1964.

74 Giovanna Leone and Tiziana Mastrovito, 'Learning About Our Shameful Past: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Present-Day Historical Narratives of Italian Colonial Wars',

On the other hand, the multiple and oppositional memories and histories of the occupation hinder political and intellectual attempts to construct a coherent narrative about the occupation. This multiplicity of memories resulted from or reflected the Italian policy of divide (and define) and rule, but more importantly those existing divisions within Ethiopia which were rooted in internal rivalries and grievances.⁷⁵ One example is the Manichean binary, though simplistic, between resisters and collaborators and the post-war promotion of the latter at the expense of the former. Commemoration of such a past is therefore destined to elicit contradictory memories, one of heroism and sacrifice, the other of betrayal and humiliation.⁷⁶

This last part underscores the fact that the representation of the Ethiopian experience of Italian occupation is not homogenous but a rich collection of selective memory and counter-memory, which partly resulted from the country's evolving political dynamics and ideologies. Between 1941 and 1975, for example, a unilinear or hegemonic narrative sanctioned by the state pervaded public memory and scholarship on the occupation. The period since then represents a fragmentation of the account and a fragmentary representation of the experience and by extension of the nation. This splintering has emerged as part of a constant 'battle with the past',⁷⁷ a

International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 4.1 (2010), 11–27; Antonio Maria Morone, 'The Trouble with Italy's Post-Colonial Memory: Affile Celebrates Rodolfo Graziani, the "Butcher of Ethiopia"', *ARL Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 11 (2012), 25–29.

75 Bahru Zewde, 'Economic Origins of the Absolutist State in Ethiopia (1916–1935)', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 17 (1984), 3.

76 McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 57. See also Irma Taddia, 'Italian Memories/African Memories of Colonialism', in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds, *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 209–220; Ulrich Braukämper, 'Indigenous Views on the Italian Occupation in Southern Ethiopia: A Post-Colonial Approach', *Aethiopica*, 14 (2011); Shiferaw Bekele, 'Treating a Taboo Subject: Review of the Literature on Collaboration in Western and Southern Ethiopia during the Period of Fascist Occupation, 1936–1941' (paper presented at the nineteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Warsaw, 24–28 August 2015); Ahmed Hassen Omer, 'The Italian Impact on Ethnic Relations: a Case Study of a Regional Policy in Northern Shoa (Ethiopia), 1936–1941', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 16 (2000).

77 Alessandro Triulzi, 'Battling with the Past: Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography', in Wendy James, Donald Donham, Eisei Kurimoto and Alessandro Triulzi, eds,

resistance to entrenched discourses which have gained momentum since the reorganization of state and polity in the 1990s. The last two or so decades have therefore seen a contest of memories and histories, two distinctly different perceptual operations, in which those in the mainstream are questioned and subjected to revisions and reformulations. Those considered marginal or on the periphery – social groups and their narratives – who have sought for the denationalization of 'historical truth' have come to the pivotal. The result is that the writing of 'national history', if that is possible or even desirable, has become difficult or complicated. This however should be seen less as a victory of memory over history or 'the end of history',⁷⁸ than as the upsurge of the quest to interrogate and understand the past, including the occupation, in its kaleidoscopic complexity and multiplicity, and write a history that is multilayered but coherent. It is true that the opportunity the Italian occupation created was not fully used and the lessons were largely ignored.⁷⁹ There is a larger issue at the heart of this failure – how history is understood and how the past is confronted. It seems that a culture of remembrance more than memorialization, a critical counting and accounting of the past – which is inscribed in the landscapes of both the colonizers and the colonized, including in the urban geography of their cities – offers a way to come to terms with a past that is never really past.

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Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After (London: James Currey, 2002), 276–288. See also his 'Adwa: From Monument to Document', *Modern Italy*, 8.1 (2003), 95–108.

78 Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

79 McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 57.

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5 Nationalism: The Italian Occupation in Amharic Literature and Political Thought

Narrating the Occupation: The 'Nationalist Mythology'

The end of the nineteenth century saw the transformation of the Solomonic Empire into a sovereign state, with a fixed territory marked by internationally recognized boundaries. Through a series of military campaigns (1880s-1900s), Emperor Mənilək II annexed large swathes of territory to the south, southwest and southeast of the traditional highland core of the age-old Solomonic Empire, mainly populated by people ethnically different from the largely Christian and *habäša* inhabitants of the old polity. Following such territorial expansion, Mənilək negotiated with European powers the demarcation of borders for the new Ethiopian polity. The 1896 victory of Adwa opened the possibility, for the Ethiopian ruling class, to theorize and implement in Ethiopia a new development model, different from the one European powers had imposed throughout the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. Ideas of religious chosenness had informed the political narratives of the Solomonic dynasty, and the Adwa victory was seen to confirm Ethiopia's 'separate destiny'. At the beginning of the twentieth century, such exceptionalism underpinned the efforts, on the part of the Ethiopian intellectual elite, to theorize a uniquely Ethiopian way to modernization, based on a process of selective hybridization of Ethiopian and European elements. Intellectuals stressed in their works how 'modernity' and 'civilization' were not prerogatives of the West. Guided by the monarchy and building on the country's glorious cultural, religious and political tradition, Ethiopia would obtain European-like levels of economic and social welfare. The 1936-1941 Italian occupation

directly challenged this teleological vision of progress. Through the lens of Amharic literature, this chapter investigates to what extent the Italian occupation put into discussion the state-sponsored nationalist narrative of Ethiopia's future glories, and to what extent Amharic writers rethought their involvement in the state's modernizing project in the post-liberation period.

The years after the 1941 liberation in Ethiopia saw a boom in Amharic literary production. The first book to be printed in Addis Ababa was a 150-page anthology entitled *Yaddis Zämän Mäzmur Sälä Näṣannät Kəbər YäItyopya Wäṭat Šähäfiwočč Yädärräsut* [Hymns of the New Era in Praise of Independence Composed by Young Ethiopian Writers]. The volume, compiled by Yälma Därräsa, contains fifty praise poems, and Yälma's preface set the agenda of post-liberation literary production by encouraging Amharic writers to turn to 'modern' genres like the novel, short story and drama.¹ The post-liberation period saw a progressive enlargement of the cultural arena, and Amharic literature began to develop more extensively, thanks to an expanded readership base. Fictional narration 'took root in Ethiopian literary taste and acquired a degree of popularity, *ləbb wälläd* – the novel – taking the position of the leading genre'.² Many of these works revisited the Italian years, and the Italian occupation remained one of the central themes in Amharic literature throughout the rest of Haylä Səlassə's reign. New themes gained popularity in the 1960s, but works about the Italian occupation kept being published throughout the Därg period and up to the present. This chapter analyses three novels and two plays from the Haylä Səlassə and early Därg period: Gərmaččäw Täklä-Hawaryat's *Araya*, Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs's *Agazi* [the titles are the protagonists' names], Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw's *Almotkum Bayye Alwašəm* [I will not Lie and Say that I was not Dead], Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw's *YäDäm*

1 Luigi Fusella, 'Recenti Pubblicazioni Amariche in Abissinia', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 5 (1946), 98–101.

2 Asfaw Damte and Nosnitsin, Denis, 'Ləbb Wälläd', in Siegbert Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* He-N (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 532. Because there are no family names in Ethiopia, Ethiopian authors are cited by first name, as common practice in Ethiopian studies.

Dəms [The Voice of Blood] and Mängəstu Lämmä's *Šärra Kolonyalist* [Anti-colonialist].

The subject of the Italian occupation was a sensitive one for Haylä Səlassə, given his contentious decision to leave the country after the Mayčäw defeat. The Emperor presented this move as a change of strategy – from war on the battlefield to the more 'modern' diplomatic struggle to be waged through international law and international organizations. Previous Ethiopian Emperors had died on the battlefield (Yohannəs IV) or, faced with imminent defeat, had chosen to commit suicide before falling into the hands of the enemy (Tewodros II). Mənilək II, on his part, was famed for his military prowess and his skills as commander; his leadership during the 1896 battle of Adwa was celebrated in oral and written literature, historiography and the arts. Haylä Səlassə's 1936 exile, in comparison with the bravery of his predecessors, was perceived as the opposite of heroic. The *arbäññočč* [Ethiopian resistance fighters, the 'patriots'] were particularly resentful: the Emperor had left them alone, without a central leader, to struggle against the Italians. Equally contentious was Haylä Səlassə's reputation, after defeating the Italians in 1941, of promoting the collaborators and marginalizing the *arbäññočč*. After being restored on the throne, Haylä Səlassə granted an amnesty to all those who had cooperated with the Italians. Rather than the end-result of a process of multilateral reconciliation, the amnesty was more directly aimed at quickly disposing of the voices of those who had not remained faithful to the Emperor.

As these examples show, in 1941 the Emperor's legitimacy was challenged by different sectors of Ethiopian society. For Haylä Səlassə, it was a priority to appear in control and demonstrate that his authority had remained strong when the Italians were in the country. From here came the need to closely regulate the way the Italian occupation was narrated in public memory, literary works and historiography. The yearly celebrations of the Adwa victory, for example, became more subdued in tone compared to the pomp and splendour of the other newly designated national holiday, Victory Day (also called Patriots' Day) on 5 May.³ Haylä Səlassə

3 Biniam Weldegebreil, 'Memories of the Victory of Adwa: A Focus on its Commemoration (1941–1999)', MA thesis (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2004), 33.

probably did not want to invite comparisons between Mənilək's quick and relatively easy victory in 1896 and the less honourable five-year struggle under his leadership. Post-1941 intellectual output shows a similar reticence towards the Adwa victory, and works devoted to the battle were few and far between.⁴ The Adwa commemorations increasingly glorified the role played in the battle by *Ras* Mäkonən, who was Haylä Səlasse's father and one of Mənilək's top generals, hoping that some of Mäkonən's military bravery, by virtue of genealogy, would reflect on his son.

Because Haylä Səlasse's legitimacy was directly affected by how the Italian occupation was interpreted, the Emperor's censors were more alert than usual when it came to reviewing works treating the Italian years. This made it hard for writers to deviate from the canonized way of representing the occupation. The literary works published in the post-liberation period, therefore, tend to endorse what Charles McClellan calls a 'nationalist mythology'.⁵ Post-liberation novels, poems and plays were informed by a formulaic patriotic framework, based on the glorification of the patriots' resistance. Most works made a point of celebrating the resilience of Ethiopian nationhood under the long-distance guide of the Emperor. United, the Ethiopians had won over the invaders, and the Emperor could therefore proceed with his modernizing plans. The defeat of the Italians in 1941 is narrated in this nationalist literature as the moment Ethiopia 'got back on track' in its path towards progress and state-building.

Interpretations inspired by this framework tend to present the 1935–1941 years as a great national and moral victory for Ethiopia, thus minimizing the consequences of the occupation. Rather than an 'occupation', Ethiopian sources refer to the period from 1935 to 1941 as a second Italo-Ethiopian war, won by the Ethiopians just like its antecedent in 1895–1896. In the poems regularly published on newspapers around Adwa day, the authors attempt to correlate the 1896 and 1941 'victories' as closely as possible, sometimes going as far as describing Adwa as a victory against fascists. Two poems published on the newspaper *Addis Zāmān*

4 Biniam, 'Memories', 87–88.

5 Charles McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War', *Northeast African Studies*, 3.1 (1996), 66.

[New Era] show the equivalence drawn between the 'Adwa triumph' and the '1941 triumph'. The first poem describes how Haylä Səlasse concluded the work initiated by Mənilək 'That evil was crushed by Mənilək/And buried by Täfäri/We, the sons of Täfäri, feel proud/Our enemy is dead and will not arise again'.⁶ Ethiopia defeated the fascists twice, in 1896 under Mənilək's leadership and 1941 under Haylä Səlasse's. Haylä Səlasse buried the Italians once for all, and therefore his 1941 victory, the poem suggests, is even more resounding than Mənilək's. The second poem remembers the battle of Adwa as a victory against fascism: 'All Fascists standing at Adwa/They were waiting for what would come [Mənilək]/Fascists were proud of their weapons/Mənilək defeated them with his arms'.⁷ The second line uses *səmmənnā wärk*, the 'wax and gold' literary technique whereby the reader has to decipher the text's 'golden' meaning (the name of Mənilək) by melting the 'waxy' surface of *mən yələk* [what will He [i.e. God] send].

In these poems, the fascist occupation is presented as a marginal interlude in the history of the country, an overall negligible intermission 'which can hardly reduce Ethiopia's reputation as a potent bulwark of anti-colonial resistance in Africa'.⁸ From this premise, nationalist historiography argues that Ethiopia 'has never really been forced under a colonial yoke and that the survival of its independence was principally uninterrupted'.⁹ The literary works published in the years after the liberation depict the 1935–1941 period as a war against foreign aggressors, but the colonial character of the Italian invasion is rarely taken into account. Literary works do not describe the international context in which the invasion took place, and seldom relate Italy's attack to European colonialism elsewhere in the world, in its ideological, political and economic dimensions.

The focus of Amharic works is rather the patriotism, heroism and military prowess of Ethiopian fighters. Italian and European history are

6 *Addis Zāmān* 25/339 (Yäkatit 6, 1958).

7 *Addis Zāmān* 25/354 (Yäkatit 23, 1958).

8 Ulrich Braukämper, 'Indigenous Views on the Italian Occupation in Southern Ethiopia: A Post-Colonial Approach', *Aethiopica*, 14 (2011), 180.

9 Braukämper, 'Indigenous Views on the Italian Occupation in Southern Ethiopia', 180.

narrated in an assimilationist way, as extensions of Ethiopian history, making it clear that Ethiopia is the centre of time, and other countries are peripheral to it. Such centripetal orientation emerges quite starkly in the way Italian motivations are portrayed. The rise of fascism in the early 1920s and the 1935 invasion are entirely explained as products of the desire to avenge the Adwa defeat. The point of view is internal to Ethiopia, and the main objective is describing the military and social cohesion of the country under aggression. Thanks to the resistance of the *arbännnočč*, the Italians never managed to establish control over large parts of the country, particularly mountainous areas. Fictional and non-fictional works celebrated the courage of Ethiopian soldiers and the sacrifices of the martyrs fallen to defend their country's independence and religion. Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw's *Almotkum Bayye Alwašəm* [I Will Not Lie and Say That I Was Not Dead] (1954–1955) shows the protagonist Ato Tāmačču devastated at the death of his son Kənde on the battlefield, but honoured that Kənde died for such a noble cause and proud that his son's body lies on top of the enemy he killed before dying.

McClellan's use of the term 'amnesia' points at the partial removal from public and historical consciousness of some of the legacies of the fascist conquest. For McClellan, the Italian occupation

was an event that [...] created opportunity for Ethiopians to re-examine the nature and meaning of their state. Unfortunately, the opportunity was not fully used, since in the aftermath of the war, Ethiopians ignored many of the war's fundamental lessons and merely replaced old mythology with new.¹⁰

Although censorship limited the possibilities for writers to freely reflect on the causes and implications of the Italian occupation, the writers' reticence seems to go beyond that. The nationalist mythology promoted by post-liberation works was not just the effect of censorship, but rather reflected a broad ideological consensus and a general reluctance, on the part of the Ethiopian state intelligentsia, to reconsider the claims of Ethiopian imperial nationalism.

¹⁰ McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 57.

The monarchical nationalism based on the Solomonic myth, describing a God-ordained monarchy whose glories would stably increase until a final eschatological triumph, was both convincing and reassuring. Early twentieth-century intellectuals had partly secularized this narrative, turning it into a teleology of *zāmānawinnāt* [modernity] and *sələttane* [civilization]. Leading the country's march forward was the monarch, who, in his divine mandate, also acted as a moral guide for the Ethiopian people.¹¹ The process of state- and nation-building was understood an essential element for progress. The nation was conceived as a transhistorical entity, and state borders were perceived as a legal formalization of a timeless identity. This identity was almost exclusively modelled on the *habäša* heritage of the old Ethiopian Empire, representing the Christian and Amharic-speaking ruling class. Despite standing for only a portion of the Ethiopian population, this heritage was thought that to be able to – or, more forcefully, to have a right to – accommodate also non-*habäša* subjects. While *habäša* culture was national and truly Ethiopian, non-*habäša* cultures were considered tribal, particularistic, less Ethiopian and less prestigious. The nationhood envisioned by the ruling elite was not an egalitarian synthesis of all Ethiopian cultural traditions, but a forceful extension of one culture onto others, via policies of centralization and assimilation.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Ethiopian intellectuals observed that their country was less developed than European nations, but they never explained this lag in terms of an intrinsic Ethiopian cultural inferiority. The perceived backwardness was seen as the product of a number of accidental and unfortunate historical circumstances, which prevented Ethiopia to be in its rightful place among the world's great powers. The Adwa victory was seen to confirm that Ethiopia had a destiny of progress akin to that of European nations. Ethiopia was the 'smallest' of the 'big' countries, but still 'big', as formalized by its membership to the League of Nations. The widespread Europhilia of the beginning of the twentieth century derived from the conception that Ethiopia could borrow from Europe on equal terms, as same-level partners.

¹¹ Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, 'Charting Out Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism', *Callalao*, 33.1 (2010), 91.

In line with previous Ethiopian political thought, early twentieth-century intellectuals identified the nation with the monarchy, and conceived the monarchy as the primary force for modernization. Modernity was thus conceived as 'part of a transcendent kingly moral insight'.¹² The Italian occupation called this idea into question. Already the Emperor's exile – for some not an exile, but just a cowardly escape – casted doubts over his right to rule. Literary authors rarely focused on the Emperor's 'diplomatic struggle' abroad, evidently believing that it did not offer much dramatic material for the readers. Those close to Haylä Səlassə, like propaganda master Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (1894–1981) in his novel *Agazi*, portrayed the exile as a brilliant strategy. Published in instalments in *Addis Zāmān* from 1946 and later printed as a book in 1968–1969, *Agazi* consistently uses biblical quotes and metaphors to talk about Haylä Səlassə as holy and saint-like. On the circumstances leading to the exile, Wäldä-Giyorgis tells us that the aristocrats and the clerics agreed that the Emperor had to be saved, 'as he was chosen to resurrect Ethiopia',¹³ and encouraged him to go abroad. His supporters followed him 'like the disciples followed Christ'.¹⁴ He alone carried the cross for Ethiopia in the hour of need, like Simon of Cyrene did for Jesus.¹⁵ Without him for the people 'the world does not mean anything'.¹⁶ He fought the Italians like David fought Goliath: both David and Haylä Səlassə ultimately won against their enemy despite having inferior weapons.

This last metaphor glorifies the Emperor, but at the same time stresses the disparities between the Italian and the Ethiopian army. At Adwa forty years before the two armies were more or less evenly balanced in terms of equipment and armaments, but in 1935 the technological gap between the armies was dramatically bigger, Ethiopian authors observed, and this despite years of modernizing efforts in Ethiopia. Amharic writers were

12 Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, 'Charting Out Ethiopian Modernity', 91.

13 Wäldä-Giyorgis, *Agazi*, 70. Some of the translations from *Agazi* and *Araya* are adapted from Anteneh Aweke Ewnetu.

14 Wäldä-Giyorgis, *Agazi*, 62.

15 Wäldä-Giyorgis, *Agazi*, 85.

16 Wäldä-Giyorgis, *Agazi*, 62.

aware that their country's military weakness vis-à-vis the assaulters had several causes, and could not only be ascribed to the failures of Ethiopian elites. Post-1941 Amharic novels and plays also mention the Italians' use of chemical weapons, outlawed in various post-First World War international conventions, the arms embargo against Ethiopia, and the betrayal of the League of Nations.¹⁷

Of all these factors, the international disregard for Ethiopia had deep repercussions on the way Ethiopian intellectuals conceived Ethiopia's global position. Perhaps the Ethiopian ruling elite, in its post-Adwa confidence, had underestimated the Italians and overestimated their country's own international standing; in any case, Haylä Səlassə's trust in the League of Nations had been misplaced. State nationalism was founded on the tenet that Ethiopia was one of the world's 'big' nations, but the unsympathetic reaction of European powers at the news of the Italian invasion made this claim seem shaky. The nations possessing *səlatane* [civilization] refused to consider Ethiopia one of their own, leading Ethiopian intellectuals to reassess the pre-war Europhilia and the self-assurance inspired by Adwa.

Although these issues were never openly addressed in post-1941 cultural production, it is still possible to trace in novels and plays a general concern about the pace of Ethiopia's development. The promise of a destiny of power and grandeur started to seem far from concretizing. Wäldä-Giyorgis appears thin-skinned on the issue, and, in attempting to defend the government's record, he partly contradicts, or at least complicates, his David and Goliath metaphor. By equating Ethiopia with David, he sees the risk of denoting his country as backward and inferior. The Italians, he narrates, were on the contrary envious 'of the advancement Ethiopia had made and the progress it had reached in its civilization and its knowledge', thanks to the commitment of the Emperor.¹⁸ Here Wäldä-Giyorgis is trying to present Ethiopia's weakness as heroic, without dwelling too much on it, for fear of betraying insecurity about the government's past deeds and the country's future prospects. Ethiopia is developing, but for

17 Zelealem Banti, 'The Theme of Italian Occupation in Major Amharic Novels and Plays', MA thesis (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1990), 16–24.

18 Wäldä-Giyorgis, *Agazi*, 9.

now is still a 'David': a 'David' on its way to becoming a 'Goliath' like Italy. However, such rhetorical solution is not completely convincing, and the contradiction between Ethiopia's claim to greatness and the perceived lag in development remained.

A final, but substantial, area of concern for intellectuals assessing the legacy of the occupation was the question of national unity. Post-liberation writers were faced with the issue of how to represent the collaborators and how to explain their defections. A religious framework was chosen, equating the patriots with virtue and the collaborators with sin. Most fictional and non-fictional works revisiting the occupation describe Ethiopia as torn between two factions, on one side the patriots and on the other side the collaborators, called *banda*. As underlined by Shiferaw Bekele in a 2015 presentation, the two groups are portrayed as impermeable monolithic blocs, antithetically representing moral righteousness on the one hand and moral wickedness on the other. Such Manichean distinction does not consider collaboration as a choice that depended on political and ideological stances or practical survival strategies. Collaboration with the occupiers is always described as resulting from sins such as greed and cowardice. In the desire to preserve Ethiopia's nationalist mythology, the oppositional voices that surfaced during the occupation were actively suppressed, and the collaborators silenced. To date, their histories and motivations have never been studied in detail in academic or non-academic literature. Shiferaw argues that the issue of collaboration remains a 'taboo subject' in present-day Ethiopia.¹⁹

The events on the ground show a picture much more nuanced than the one presented through the use of such stark Manichean dichotomy. The history of the occupation saw many Ethiopians take up intermediate positions, shifting from one side to the other, or trying to find a compromise between factions. In most cases, the first objective of many Ethiopians was to preserve their life and defend their family, livelihood and property.

19 Shiferaw Bekele, 'Treating a Taboo Subject: Review of the Literature on Collaboration in Western and Southern Ethiopia during the Period of Fascist Occupation, 1936–1941' (paper presented at the nineteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Warsaw, 24–28 August 2015).

Patriotism 'was not always the defining motive' of their choices.²⁰ The peasants were probably victimized by both the Ethiopian patriots and Italian (or pro-Italian) forces. Many patriots only fought for brief periods of time and not for the whole duration of the war. Some resistance leaders surrendered to the Italians and were allowed to live in Addis Ababa in relative peace, at least until the brutal repression following the failed attack on Rodolfo Graziani's life in February 1937. Clashes between different patriot groups were not at all uncommon. When the Italians invaded, local conflicts flared up in many different areas of the country. Ulrich Braukämper, for example, reports that 'incessant internal fighting' broke out in the south when news of Mayčäw defeat spread: 'it was obviously the most chaotic and cruel time the inhabitants of those areas had ever experienced'.²¹ The war was, for Ethiopians, 'as much a civil war as one against foreign aggression'.²² The war opened many more fault lines in Ethiopian society than the one-dimensional binary between patriots and collaborators implies.

The Italians greatly contributed to putting one faction against the other. Their propaganda represented a conflict-ridden Ethiopia, whose internal discriminatory practices, slavery and inter-ethnic oppression could only be solved via the pacifying intervention of an enlightened European power. This narrative was, for Haylä Səlasse and the intellectuals close to him, extremely insidious, and counteracting it became a government priority. The Ethiopians retorted that it was the Italians who single-handedly disrupted Ethiopia's time-honoured social harmony and invented divisions where traditionally there were none. This argument has remained influential to date, but historical records present a more complicated scenario. Italian propaganda exploited already-existing discontent and divisions, and the fascists' divide and rule policies proved effective whenever they addressed long-standing internal grievances: 'While some of the factions evident during the war were emerging earlier, the war reinforced and broadened these, and these factions dominated Ethiopian politics in the post-war period. The Italians in the 1930s had

20 McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 62.

21 Braukämper, 'Indigenous Views on the Italian Occupation', 171.

22 McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 57.

ready opportunity to promote a divide and rule policy in Ethiopia'.²³ The Italians systematically favoured groups that until that moment had been excluded from power, such as Muslims, while Orthodox Christians and Amhara elites were singled out for repression. They divided Italian East Africa into macro provinces along ethno-cultural lines, each with its own local language of instruction. The Italian attempts to foment internal discord were not entirely successful, and many non-Amhara remained mistrustful of the Italians' advances. Nonetheless, many responded positively to the Italian reforms, leading Bahru Zewde to conclude that 'feudal Ethiopia in 1896 was much more united against external aggression than feudo-capitalist Ethiopia in 1935'.²⁴ The Italian rule left behind a 'lasting legacy of interethnic discord considerably heightened by the bitter memories of bloody confrontations during the five-year period'.²⁵ The events during the occupation signalled that 'many Ethiopians were discontented, and many had only weak loyalty to the existing state'.²⁶ thus suggesting that pre-war nation-building had been flawed and defective.

Nonetheless, in literature and historiography, these fault lines were not accounted for, and in the desire to reaffirm the ideal of Ethiopian unity, the 'disagreements [and] the differing visions [were] merely papered over'.²⁷ Tensions were dealt with only when they surfaced, while the deep-seated 'unity of the nation was assumed and largely unquestioned; many at the centre understood Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic state, but one bound firmly together by ancient traditions of monarchy, church and culture' and did not want to admit that in fact 'Ethiopia was vulnerable on this issue'.²⁸ The Italo-Ethiopian war made apparent that there were some deep-rooted internal divisions in Ethiopia, but the Ethiopian elites preferred to reaffirm

²³ McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 57.

²⁴ Bahru Zewde, 'Economic origins of the absolutist state in Ethiopia (1916–1935)', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 17 (1984), 3.

²⁵ Ahmed Hassen Omer, 'The Italian impact on ethnic relations: a case study of a regional policy in Northern Shoa (Ethiopia), 1936–1941', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 16 (2000), 159.

²⁶ McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 59.

²⁷ McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 66.

²⁸ McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 60.

the validity of traditional political culture rather than addressing them. The Emperor and his censors prevented discussing the divisiveness that had emerged in Ethiopia during the occupation. As a result, post-1941 political thought continued to be characterized by 'a centralist vision of national integration', accompanied, however, by 'a corresponding anxiety about the centrifugal tendencies latent in a heterogeneous state like Ethiopia'.²⁹

Such anxiety about national unity transpires here and there in post-independence intellectual production. The Italian propaganda touched a nerve, and many intellectuals remained concerned about the danger it posed to the legitimacy of state nationalism. Kābbādā Mikael wrote his *Ityopyanna Məəhrabawi Səlaṭtane* [Ethiopia and Western Civilization] as a long rebuttal of Italian propaganda about the persistence of slavery in Ethiopia. His detailed treatment of the obstacles Ethiopian emperors faced in trying to abolish slavery, as well as his description of how slaves in Ethiopia were humanely and compassionately cared for,³⁰ are conducted in a defensive tone, showing that, eight years after the liberation, he felt the point had not yet been brought home and the matter had not yet been settled once for all. Arguments like Kābbādā's 'belied a certain fear' indicating that at least some members of the Ethiopian elite 'knew deep in their hearts that the supposed solidarity of the nation was not all that their propaganda purported'.³¹

In the rest of the chapter, I will focus on Gərmaččaw Tāklä-Hawaryat's novel *Araya* (1948–1949) and Mängəstu Lämmä's play *Šarra Kolonyalist* (written 1973, published 1983), as examples of how literature let these apprehensions transpire while upholding the nationalist mythology. *Araya* is one of the most well-known works on the Italian occupation, and a model for subsequent works on the theme, such as Sahlä-Səlassə Bərhanä-Maryam's *Baša Kəṭaw* (1983). It was used as textbook in Ethiopian government schools throughout the 1950s and 1960s, therefore it institutionalized many aspects

²⁹ Bahru Zewde, *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), 86–87.

³⁰ Kābbādā Mikael, *Ityopyanna Məəhrabawi Səlaṭtane – Ethiopia and Western Civilisation – L'Éthiopie et la civilisation occidentale* (Addis Ababa: Bərhanənnā Sālam Press, 1948/1949), 58–71.

³¹ McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation', 61.

of the nationalist mythology. At the same time, however, *Araya* questions some of the tenets of patriotic literature and historiography, criticizing for example the Emperor's conduct during the war. *Šärä Kolonyalist* is lesser known, perhaps precisely for avoiding the self-congratulatory tone of mainstream nationalist literature such as *Agazi*. Both *Araya* and *Šärä Kolonyalist*, in different ways, are vehicles for patriotism, but also add new layers to the interpretation of Ethiopia's experience of European colonial violence.

Gərmaččaw Tāklä-Hawaryat's *Araya* (1948–1949)

Gərmaččaw Tāklä-Hawaryat's *Araya* (1948–1949) is perhaps the most multi-layered novel on the Italian occupation published in the post-independence period. The protagonist's name makes it clear who is the hero: *araya* means 'good example'. The character is modelled on Gərmaččaw's father, Tāklä-Hawaryat Tāklä-Maryam, a prominent political figure during the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. Gərmaččaw (1915–1987) grew up in his father's farm at Hərna, and then attended the French school in Dəre Dawa. When his father was sent to France as ambassador, Gərmaččaw followed him there and graduated in 1935 with a BA degree in theology. During the Italian invasion he fled to Djibouti, but returned to Addis Ababa in 1937. He was arrested in the aftermath of the attempt on Graziani's life, and spent six years in prison in Italy. After the liberation, he had a high-profile political career, and rose to become one of the most important members of Haylä Səlaşe's cabinet. He was appointed to prominent ambassadorial and ministerial positions throughout the 1950s and 1960s. *Araya* was published at the beginning of his political ascendancy, when he was director-general of the Office for Europe in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The plot of the novel is quite simple, and dialogues dominate over action. A native of Tägulät, the protagonist Araya returns to Ethiopia after fifteen years abroad and university studies in France. He is determined to play a role in the modernization of the Ethiopian state, and takes up a job at the Ministry of Agriculture. His aspirations are soon frustrated by his

colleagues, and he grows disappointed at the intrigues and inefficiencies in the government. He therefore chooses to withdraw from government service, moves to the countryside and lives as a farmer until the Italian attack. The war pushes him into action, and he becomes a resistance fighter. Eleven chapters of the novel are dedicated to narrating the struggle against the Italian invaders. After the liberation, he is again offered government jobs, and he is undecided whether to accept them or not.

Compared to other post-1941 works, *Araya* offers a deeper insight on the causes and conduct of the war, mentioning for example that Mussolini decided to invade Ethiopia to alleviate Italy's economic problems and to relocate poverty-stricken Italians in the new colony. At the beginning of the novel, *Araya* talks with admiration of some pre-1935 government reforms, mentioning in particular the 1931 constitution, the establishment of new state schools, and the centralization of power as important achievements. However, he wants more, and suggests the next step should be for the people to have the right to elect their local own representatives. At the same time, he strongly criticizes the Ethiopian political elites for indulging in the feeling of Adwa's nationalist grandeur and failing to realistically assess the Italian threat.

Overconfidence, complacency, and hollow pride are, in Araya's assessment, some of the main causes of the Ethiopian capitulation at Mayčəw. In the novel, *Ato Alämayähu*, a veteran of Adwa, reacts with smugness at the news that the Italians were about to invade Ethiopia a second time in 1935. He reminds Araya that at Adwa 'we defeated the Italians armed only with our sticks and spears',³² but Araya is not so optimistic. He points at the differences in preparation and organization between the two armies, worrying in particular about the Italian war planes, whose presence, he forecasts, could be decisive. *Ato Alämayähu* and his boastings about Ethiopia's military invincibility are later proven wrong.³³ In this regard, it should be noted that it was easy for Gərmaččaw, who wrote the novel in the late 1940s, to present Araya as a shrewd political analyst by making him predict future events exactly as Gərmaččaw knew they happened in reality.

³² Gərmaččaw Tāklä-Hawaryat, *Araya* [proper noun] (Asmara: Pietro Silla, 1948/1949), 228.

³³ Zelealem, 'The Theme of Italian Occupation', 27–28.

More than once, Araya is disappointed at how the Ethiopian leaders conduct the military campaign. The soldiers sent to the front have low morale, are poorly trained and have old, low-quality weapons. Chances for Ethiopia to win are fewer because of the general lack of communication and coordination between the different sectors of the army and because of the delays in mobilizing the soldiers.³⁴ The narration is equally forthright when describing the confusion, fear and suffering of the soldiers retreating from Mayčäw.³⁵ 'They did not look like soldiers', says Araya of the retreating army, 'Their spirits were dead, their hearts had dried up'.³⁶

Nevertheless, the war is still depicted as a victory of Ethiopia's national values. The Italian aggression provoked a surge of patriotic spirit and a new determination to defend the homeland. For years, Araya maintains, Ethiopians had been too lazy to actively commit to the improvement of their country. The invasion revived Ethiopia's national identity, and therefore it is almost welcomed by Araya. Nonetheless, the novel shows that the war did not produce any heroes, and the character of Araya is himself an ambiguous 'good example', despite his name. His personality is shaped by his role in the resistance, but also and more importantly, by his education in France. He retires to private life after the liberation, disappointed that the brave spirit of the resistance did not lead to any substantial national progress. The war had cancelled the laziness and numbness of the Ethiopian spirit, but after the war the people stopped being concerned about the nation and its values once again. And in contrast with the warrior-kings of Ethiopia's past, Haylä Səlassə gave up fighting and abandoned the country.

Gərmaččäw, quite daringly, paints Haylä Səlassə's exile in negative terms, and his characters are critical of the Emperor's strategic decision to fight the Italians in a frontal battle, thus exposing the Ethiopian army to the destructive firepower of Italian aeroplanes, rather than opting for guerrilla operations.³⁷ Gərmaččäw cannot afford to be too explicit, but it is not difficult to see what he is implying when his Araya states that 'the

³⁴ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 232–234.

³⁵ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 175.

³⁶ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 243.

³⁷ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 284–285.

people of Ethiopia do not fight valiantly if the king is not with them. They need their leader, their guide'.³⁸ Araya proclaims that the people have to remain strong 'even though our army is beaten and our Emperor has been exiled'.³⁹ As noted by Anteneh, the verb *täsädädu* [he was exiled] suggests that Haylä Səlassə was forced to leave the country against his will, but the description of how the decision was reached is more ambiguous and insinuating. Gərmaččäw depicts a general confusion, people coming in and out of the imperial compound, counsellors offering different advice. 'People said many things', states the narrator, without further clarifications.⁴⁰ Anteneh also draws attention to another passage in the novel, where Gərmaččäw's qualms about Haylä Səlassə's conduct are even more evident. For instance, this is how the narrator portrays the people's reaction at the news that the Italians had entered Addis Ababa:

Like any people in the world, the people of Ethiopia were angry with their leaders and soon felt the yoke of the enemy. They expressed their sorrow and anger, and made the leaders responsible for all this evil situation; gradually, when their anger vanished and started to realize the difficulty and malice and power of the Italians, they wanted leaders that could organize and lead them in the fight against the Italians. Even though the people were willing to fight the Italians, they could not be successful since there was no central commander who could coordinate them; besides, the other officials or warlords were not in good terms with each other. [This] created a good opportunity to the enemy.⁴¹

Compared to the ample space given in the novel to the struggle of the patriots, the Emperor remains quite a marginal character. He is portrayed riding a mule during the retreat from Mayčäw, protected on all sides by soldiers shielding him from the raids of two Wällo Oromö groups, the Rayya and the Azäbo – hardly the image of a military hero.

³⁸ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 242.

³⁹ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 285.

⁴⁰ Gərmaččäw, *Araya*, 261.

⁴¹ Quoted in Anteneh Aweke Ewnetu, 'The Representation of Ethiopian Politics in Selected Amharic novels: 1930–2010', PhD thesis (Johannesburg: University of South Africa, 2014), 86–87.

Although the war awakened Ethiopia's national fervour, Araya makes it clear that Ethiopia's nationhood is not a preordained God-sent gift, but needs to be actively kept alive and constantly reenergized. The novel mentions that some Ethiopian chiefs were bribed by the Italians and betrayed their compatriots, while some Ethiopian groups turned against the imperial army or deserted. Even Ethiopian military chiefs were often in disagreement. More significantly, *Araya* also reflects on the multi-ethnic make-up of the Ethiopian state, showing how groups that had just recently been incorporated into the Ethiopian state still had weak loyalties to it. Araya reasons that 'though the Ethiopian people lived under a single state, they still lacked mutual agreement due to cultural variations emanating from tribal and particular religious differences'.⁴² He goes on to acknowledge the internal power relation in the country between *habäša* and non-*habäša*, the grievances the latter have towards the former, and how Italian propaganda successfully taps into those grievances. The Amharas are worried, *Araya* explains, 'that the people who had been ruled by our forefathers as serfs and slaves, when they see that the Amharas are under attack, might turn against them and side with the enemy'.⁴³ This is perhaps the closest a post-war Ethiopian author went to raising the issue of the legacy of interethnic bitterness in the country. This, together with the criticism of the Emperor's choices during the 1935–1936 campaign, differentiates *Araya* from the rest of post-1941 intellectual production.

Despite these slight deviations from the nationalist mythology, *Araya's* solution is the same endorsed by Haylä Səlasse: a more determined assimilationist effort. Educational policies, Araya believes, would create a homogeneous national culture, thus overcoming religious and ethnic sectionalism.⁴⁴ If the passage quoted above recognizes the inter-ethnic grievances produced by the institution of slavery and the system of land tenure, Gərmaččaw is nevertheless quick in refuting Italian propaganda. He resolutely announces that 'diversity has been overcome during the Šäwa dynasty, especially during the reign of Haylä Səlasse, and the government stands for all Ethiopians'.⁴⁵

⁴² Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 300.

⁴³ Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 300.

⁴⁴ Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 113.

⁴⁵ Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 300.

And yet, 'the Italians will not refrain from claiming that all power was in the hands of Šäwa and the other groups were marginalised'.⁴⁶

The grievances of those 'people who had been ruled by our fathers as serfs and slaves' are seen as elements of danger to quash, not as legitimate political positions to listen to. The accusation of cowardice and moral corruptness can be traced in the way collaborators from these groups are characterized. Araya thinks that their pro-Italian stance was motivated by 'fear, ignorance, or sheer immorality'.⁴⁷ The construction of alterity remains in the novel highly problematic. Among the hardships faced by Ethiopian soldiers in their ruinous retreat from Mayčäw, Gərmaččaw describes the attacks of the Rayya and the Azäbo:

While the [Italian] planes were roaring and frightening the heavens, the Rayya and the Azäbo concealed behind every bush and boulder, had surrounded and were harrying [some] of the wayfarers like hyenas and wolves. Slathered with butter, clad in kilt-like garments [*goldəm*], wearing their hair in wild shocks and armed with swords, they would unexpectedly appear from behind bushes and rocks. Shouting 'capitulate, capitulate! Surrender your rifle! It's better than death! Don't perish!'. In a flash, they struck at random like hawks, like hungry wolves, snatching rifles here, firing there, evirating corpses another place.⁴⁸

The repeated comparisons with ferocious wild animals (hyenas, wolves, hawks) contribute to characterize the two Oromo groups as savage and barbaric tribes. They materialize in the narration out of nowhere, without a previous history; no mention is made of their motivation and of the cultural and political context in which their decision to assault the Ethiopian army was taken. The Rayya and Azäbo are a radical opposite of the author's self; they act in ways that are incomprehensible and no dialogue is possible with them. Although *Araya* represents the Italian occupation from a refreshingly broad and multi-layered perspective, it presents cultural alterity according to the prevailing nationalist models.

⁴⁶ Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 300.

⁴⁷ Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 297.

⁴⁸ Gərmaččaw, *Araya*, 175, quoted in Thomas Leiper Kane, *Ethiopian Literature in Amharic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1975), 159–160.

Mängəstu Läm̄ma's *Šär̄ra Kolonyalist* (1983)

One of the most celebrated Amharic poets and playwrights, Mängəstu Läm̄ma (1928–1988), grew up in Harar, where he was educated in Geez, Bible studies, religious music and traditional poetry, and became a master at the use of *kəne*. After high school at the Haylā Səlasse I Secondary School in Addis Ababa he got a scholarship to study at the London School of Economics. He spent seven years in London, from 1948 to 1954. Back in Ethiopia, he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in 1969–1970 became secretary-general of the Amharic Language Academy. His two most famous plays, *Tälfo Bäkise* [Marriage by Abduction] (1968–1969) and *Yalačča Gabəčča* [Marriage of Unequals] (1964–1965), analyse the changes in Ethiopian society from the vantage point of marriage customs. He had a distinguished career as a civil servant, diplomat and professor in the Theatre Arts Department of Addis Ababa University.

Mängəstu told Jane Plastow that his *Šär̄ra Kolonyalist* [Anti-Colonialist], originally titled 'Kasse' after one of the characters] was written as early as 1973, but he feared that it would have been judged unsuitable for production and therefore only staged it after the 1974 Revolution, in 1981–1982.⁴⁹ What made *Šär̄ra Kolonyalist* unacceptable in Haylā Səlasse's time? Representing the life of various groups of people in a small town under the Italians, the play refuses to portray all characters as pure and heroic. It rather depicts the daily struggles of common people under foreign domination and the different compromises they have to make in order to survive. The secular, almost domestic atmosphere could not be farther from the grandiloquent rhetoric of Mäkönnən Əndalkäčäw's *YäDäm Dəms* [The Voice of Blood] (1954–1955), a play about the martyrdom of Abuna Peṭros, the Orthodox cleric executed by the Italians, whose intensely religious plot is full of references to God and heaven, features angels as characters, and describes Peṭros as a patriotic saint. Contrary to Mäkönnən's moralism,

49 Jane Plastow, *African Theatre and Politics: The Evolution of Theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe* (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 160.

Mängəstu treats his characters in a non-judgemental way, refrains from moral dogmatism and blurs the boundary between good and evil. For this reason, *Šär̄ra Kolonyalist* departs from the conventional way in which the Italian occupation was narrated in Amharic literature.

One of *Šär̄ra Kolonyalist*'s protagonists, Kasse, is a *wasṭ arbäñña* ['internal', undercover *arbäñña*], but he does not hesitate to set up a huge con operation to get money to finance the resistance. He convinces Wuhib, a 'man of knowledge' who is physically drained by the inhumane labour conditions under the Italians, to pretend to be a diviner and tell invented prophecies to the people needing his advice in exchange for a fee. The trick is so successful that they soon become rich, and although they extort great part of their money from the Italian authorities or the collaborators, they do not seem worried that common people are being deceived as well. Kasse, then, is a peculiar type of *arbäñña*, deceitful towards his friends and compatriots, opportunistic and scheming, and probably convinced that the good of the cause requires moral compromises. He is essentially a fundraiser, not a fighter defending the motherland on the battlefield, as the *arbäñña* was formulaically portrayed in the Amharic literary tradition.

As the example of Kasse shows, *Šär̄ra Kolonyalist* starkly rejects the traditional Manichean distinction between morally virtuous *arbäññočč* and morally hideous *banda*. The character of the Ethiopian collaborator, Aytänfəsu, is generally despicable, but not wholly unsympathetic; he is in fact still loyal to his country, and collaborates with the Italians only because forced by the circumstances. In typical Mängəstu fashion, he is made fun of more than castigated. The Italian characters too are given an unusual amount of space, and if Poggio, the overseer of the Ethiopian labourers, is a brutal and pitiless man, the other Italian character, commander Battioni, is, despite his evident racism, quite charming, and positively impresses the Ethiopian characters with his manners and his fluent Amharic.

Wuhib, the 'intellectual', selfishly enjoys his new wealth and status, and he is unconcerned about the misery and afflictions of his townsfolk. He refuses to engage in politics and instead tries to win the favour of the Italian authorities in order to improve his own personal position. When towards the end of the play it is revealed that Kasse is working with the resistance, Wuhib is genuinely distraught and disappointed. Through

Wuhib, Mängəstu articulates his criticism of the impotent, self-centred and elitist intellectuals of the 1960s – more than the intellectuals of the late 1930s, when the play is set – the ‘old guard’ who, despite being critical of the country’s state of affairs, proved unable or unwilling to commit to social change. The Italian occupation alludes, in this sense, to the repressive political situation of Haylä Səlassə’s regime, and the character of Wuhib allows Mängəstu to ask the question ‘whether the educated elite’s lack of organizational achievement and activity [in the 1960s] was due to the repressive political structure or to their own apathy’.⁵⁰

In a lucidly self-critical passage, Mängəstu decries the illusions and contradictions of the Amharic-speaking intellectual elite. Spokesperson for the author is, as in many others of Mängəstu’s works, an old man modelled on Mängəstu’s own father. In the opening of the third act, the old man is sitting alone, speaking to himself:

Oh European civilization! Them, ‘civilized’, coming to civilize us! Oh! Oh! Europe! We admired you so much! We envied you! Your reputation for beauty! Your sweet name! Your shining, warm, bright light! Where is all this today? The light of Rome has proved to be absolute darkness.⁵¹

The statement is an indictment of the Europhilia of the first and, partly, second generations of twentieth-century intellectuals. They only saw the light of Europe, the old man says, and were oblivious to – or perhaps, decided to ignore – the darkness of European racism and colonial violence. The links with European colonialism elsewhere in the world are not made explicit, so it is unclear whether Mängəstu is trying to obliquely accuse the old generations of overlooking European colonial cruelty as long as the victims were others. The critique, as powerful as it is, is just hinted, and the play stops short of building a broader argument on the shortcomings of early twentieth-century political thought.

50 Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie’s Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952–1977* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1985), 65.

51 Mängəstu Lämna, *Šärra Kolonyalist* [‘Anti-colonialist’], in *YäTäwnet Gubae* [‘Collection of Plays’] (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1983), 65.

An ‘Acolonial’ Nationalism

The nationalist mythology articulated by Amharic literary works presents Ethiopian history as ‘acolonial’, outside of the realm of colonialism and the power dynamics it implies. According to Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, the ‘acoloniality’ of Amharic political thought and the reluctance to situate Ethiopia within local and international power dynamics is the result of an ‘angst toward “Otherness”’.⁵² The term ‘otherness’ should be interpreted not only in relation to the West, but also to all the cultures within Ethiopian borders and in the broader Horn of Africa that *habäša* nationalism, in its Christian- and Amharic-centrism, tried to suppress and assimilate.

The old monarchical nationalism offered a single, totalizing explanation for all matters of religion, politics, history and identity, and the lack of equally powerful worldviews made Ethiopian intellectuals apprehensive whenever ‘other’ perspectives had the potential to destabilize, or outright undermine it. *Araya*’s scepticism of the self-assuredness ensuing from the Adwa victory, or his comments on what he sees as Ethiopia’s underdevelopment, or the old man lamenting the mistakes of Ethiopian intellectuals in *Šärra Kolonyalist* clearly express what Elizabeth, Bahru and McClennan call respectively angst, ‘anxiety’, and ‘fear’ of ‘other’ historical interpretations. And yet, according to Elizabeth, the ideological links between European modernity, colonialism and Eurocentrism tended to remain unexplored. The articulation of the difference between the West and the non-West was based on ‘an acknowledgement of marginality [in relation to the West], but one that fell short from problematizing the body of thought that qualified and authorized those categories of knowledge that privileged the West and denied the plurality and historicity of alterities’.⁵³

The ‘acolonial’ claim made by Amharic literary works has important consequences for postcolonial studies. Even just by virtue of their language choice, these are not works that ‘write back’ to the former colonizers. They

52 Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, ‘Ethiopian Modernism: A Subaltern Perspective’, PhD thesis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2010), 48.

53 Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, ‘Charting out Ethiopian Modernity’, 92.

are, instead, remarkably centripetal in character, in constant dialogue with their Ethiopian audience and the Amharic literary corpus, in its genres, themes, and characters. They talk about local concerns and negotiate home-grown value systems. The writers firmly situate themselves in a national dimension, and it is this national dimension that they address in their works. They are not engaged, for the most part, in a transnational or global discussion with audiences beyond the national borders, and even within national borders, they specifically speak to urban, educated, Amharic-speaking elites. In this sense, Amharic writers put imperial Ethiopia at the centre of history and geography, and push 'other' histories and geographies to the periphery, including those of their European aggressors. So displaced, the European heritage is, in Amharic works, selectively appropriated only when a point has to be made about Ethiopia's politics and culture. There seems to be a gap in this regard between Italian postcolonial studies, which consider the conquest of Ethiopia as a central part of Italian colonial history, and the Ethiopian literary and historiographical treatment of the period as a war won by the Ethiopians, definitely not a foreign conquest. In this sense, the Amharic works analysed in this chapter openly defy the centrality that postcolonial studies tend to give to European colonialism in the history of the Global South.

Postcolonial theories have rather been employed in Ethiopia by intellectuals whose cultural heritage was marginalized by state-sponsored Christian- and Amharic-centric nationalism. In the past couple of decades, for example, Oromo novels have employed some of the classic motifs and themes of postcolonial literature to denounce how the Oromo have been politically oppressed, economically exploited, and excluded from dominant ideas of nationhood. Oromo writers have counteracted the supremacist assumptions of much Amharic literature and articulated those internal power dynamics that Amharic writers were aware of, but preferred to remain silent about. Now the grievances of those people who, in Araya's words, 'have been ruled by our fathers as serfs and slaves' have found expression in a postcolonial literature that powerfully vindicates its right to 'otherness'.

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- , 1954–1955, *YäDäm Dəms*, in *Arrəmuññ* (Addis Ababa: Bərhanənnä Sälam Press, 1954–1955).

citing the 'racial characteristics of Italian Somalis, who are markedly more European than African: good-looking, healthy and strikingly intelligent'.⁵² For those who were defined as a 'mongrel race, the only solution was their return to Italy as Italian citizens, orphans, illegitimate children or better "Italian minors abandoned in a foreign land"' through an obvious logic of appropriation and assimilation, regardless of their ties with Somalia and their total estrangement from a country they had never been.⁵³

The ways by which the committee brought many Italian Somalis to Italy were through a network of high-placed connections, with individual politicians, civil servants and members of religious institutions who would intervene in favour of one or another Italian Somali. Specifically, a personal testimony of a priest in Turin, indicated the key role he played in organizing, on the basis of a mere 'verbal commitment', hospitality for some Italian Somalis.⁵⁴ This source confirms that many young persons arrived in Italy 'somewhat chaotically, without really knowing their destinations and the people to whom they would be entrusted, so much so that some of the girls ended up in re-education homes simply because there was an opening'.⁵⁵ The immigration project for the Italian Somalis was compromised not only by the difficulties of identifying appropriate reception facilities, but also by difficulties of placing them in school or in the workplace, depending on their age, and finally by each individual's legal status. The situation of statelessness, which was typical of many minors, could only be resolved in the courts and depended once again on involving the various institutions or people who had committed themselves to welcoming them. Italy's political involvement was thus direct, even if the decisions did not come from any specific government directive, but rather from informal practices carried out through the efforts of influential individuals on Italy's political scene in the early 1960s. The

⁵² Private correspondence, made anonymous by the author, from Mogadishu to Turin, 1 April 1963. Thanks to ANCIS permission.

⁵³ Private correspondence, made anonymous by the author, from Mogadishu to Turin, 1 April 1963.

⁵⁴ Author's interview with anonymous priest, Turin, 19 August 2010.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with anonymous priest, Turin, 19 August 2010.

lack of official involvement of the Italian government made all the actions taken unreliable and dependent on the wills of single individuals, at the expense of the persons to be 'helped'.

Another Italian Somali woman, Miriam, who was nine years old when she landed in Genoa in the mid-1960s, testifies to the haphazardness of the efforts made by the committee and the resultant suffering:

Once I had arrived, I remember my disappointment to learn that I would be entrusted to an institute run by nuns. I had hoped to be entrusted to a family and instead I found myself back in boarding school. I left it in June 1970 by decision of my legal guardian and moved to Turin. I was sixteen and not yet of age. The education I'd received in college had made me helpless and uncomfortable in any situation. The school was actually a reform school for young girls scarred by deviant experiences. My being still a child prevented me for years from comprehending the family tragedies that had marked many of my classmates. I was the youngest among them, and the others had a maternal attitude toward me. [...] The sisters became aware of my problems. They noticed I was losing weight and getting depressed and was always catching colds, and they helped me a lot. [...] My main difficulty was getting used to school. I spoke Italian incorrectly, and even though I knew how to read and write, my scholastic skills weren't up to the level of kids my age.⁵⁶

Miriam had to start her schooling from the first grade, but she eventually managed to get a university degree.

Faduma's story shows, on the contrary, a readiness to send her children to Italy through the Committee's network: 'I was glad my son was able to go to Italy because our relations with the Somalis were based on how many stones and bottles we dodged as we climbed the steps of the church, while they shouted *cufar* [infidels] at us. So, after sending my first son to Italy, I also left with my daughter for Italy'.⁵⁷ Having arrived in Turin like other Italian Somalis, Faduma became a domestic servant for a rich middle-class family, where she remained for the rest of her working life. However, she continued to be beset with problems in her relationship with her children, especially her daughter, over choosing to move to Italy and starting a new life there.

⁵⁶ Private correspondence with the author, 26 July 2010. Miriam is an invented name.

⁵⁷ Author's interview with Faduma, Turin, 14 September 2010.

Once Italian Somalis moved to Italy, their next obstacle was their relationship with Italians: 'There was ample testimony of friendly relations with young Italians', but it was still true that 'many Italians knew less about cultural difference than Italian Somalis did'.⁵⁸ Newcomers were discriminated because they were perceived as racially different, even if they managed to get a higher education in Somalia and spoke Italian fluently. Mario still remembers that in a job interview at a bank in Turin in 1965, 'we were frowned upon. We were qualified, had done our military service, but the fact of color still remained'.⁵⁹ For many others less fortunate than Mario, who had not managed to get a higher education in Somalia and maybe spoke a little broken Italian, their poor professional skills, on top of their skin colour, was another strike against them. Discrimination and marginalization often aggravated the solitude of many Italian Somalis, who in departing for Italy had definitively broken with their mothers, when these had existed. What helped recreate family dynamics for many of them were relationships between Italian Somalis themselves, who not infrequently married each other. The reason might well have been the similarity of their life stories and feelings, but perhaps also the reproduction in Italy (and in connection with the former colony) of the social stigma of a union between white Italians and dark-skinned Italian Somalis.

Postcolonial Racism

The history of Italian Somalis was not just the product of policies referable to other subjects (i.e. AFIS, the Mission, and the Somali and Italian governments), but it was also determined by the will and decisions of Italian Somalis themselves. There is no denying the charge, elicited from ANCIS's narrative, that 'the Italian postcolonial administration decided to remove

⁵⁸ Sartore, *Quando la storia degli altri racconta di noi*, 208.

⁵⁹ Author's interview with Mario, Turin, 19 August 2010.

[them] from their mothers, families and communities, and place [them] in Catholic missionary schools',⁶⁰ or at least did everything in their power to make this happen. However, the sources indicate that, in other cases the will of the mothers also had a hand in placing the children in the Mission facilities and especially that those mothers often succeeded in maintaining a relationship with their children. The life stories of Mario and Faduma testify to migratory paths in which there were multiple pressures to leave Somalia. The effects of the Italian assimilation project were combined with other factors as well, such as the social discrimination stemming from the relationship with the Somalis and the problems arising from the Somalization policies. The complexity of the history of Italian Somalis compared to the ANCIS narrative ultimately confirms for the Italian colonial context what Emanuelle Saada argues about its French counterpart, namely that 'the *métis* was not an organized group with a common identity but rather a category imposed from above by colonial actors – mainly philanthropists, administrators, and jurists'.⁶¹ The various stories of Italian Somalis thus refer to those 'diversified memories'⁶² of Italian colonialism that up to the present have been reflected in contrasting ways in the debates, studies and policies that have taken place in Italy, which have long inhibited a constructive discussion of our colonial past, relegating to oblivion the stories and testimonies of Italian Somalis.

The discrimination of Italian Somalis in Italy and Somalia shows the persistence of racial categories in the postcolonial period, combined with other categories such as gender, class, and nation. From this point of view the history of Italian Somalis in Italy has much in common with the phenomenon recently investigated by Silvana Patriarca of so-called 'war children', namely children born of unions between Italian women and non-white Allied soldiers during the Second World War, who 'suffered from the stigma

⁶⁰ Barbara Faedda, 'Stolen Generation and a Missing Reconciliation', *Anthropology News*, 56.4 (2010), 9.

⁶¹ Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children. Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

⁶² Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 458.

of being "illegitimate" and associated with a lost war',⁶³ but in addition were 'perceived and strongly marked as different because of their skin color'.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that the Italian Constitution solemnly decreed in 1948 the equality of all citizens regardless of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, social or personal conditions, Italians 'drew the color line in the same way as most Americans and Europeans did at the time [and] those who were beyond this color line were not really considered Italians'.⁶⁵

Africans, blacks and 'half-castes' ended up being seen as different on the basis of 'race', even in the absence of an explicit racist ideology, since highly racist attitudes and categories continued to persist in Italian society. Italian Somalis continued to evoke the idea of a threat to the established order which had not only stigmatized them, but also 'constructed' them in colonial times. Colonial and postcolonial Italy was therefore not so different from colonial and postcolonial French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, where 'metisage represented not the dangers of foreign enemies at national borders but the more pressing affront for European nation-states, for its interior frontiers: [...] at the level of individual, frontier marks the moral predicates by which a subject retains his or her national identity despite location outside the national frontier and despite heterogeneity within the nation-state'.⁶⁶ In other words, it was precisely because Italian Somalis enjoyed citizenship status and were therefore equal to all other Italians that they were seen as a threat.

In the discourse on racial identities, more fluid than the concept of race, the Italian Somalis formed a specific group not only for Italians, but also for Somalis. In 1956, Somalia had its own parliament and government elected by popular suffrage, with broad powers over internal policy issues, while SYL's militant nationalism embraced a unitary idea of nationhood based on the history of struggle against European colonialism and an uneasy

- 63 Silvana Patriarca, 'Fear of Small Numbers: "Brown Babies" in Postwar Italy', *Contemporanea*, 18.4 (2015), 546–547.
- 64 Silvana Patriarca, 'Fear of Small Numbers', 539.
- 65 Silvana Patriarca, 'Fear of Small Numbers', 541.
- 66 Ann L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 80.

pairing of Islam with the values of socialism and European modernity.⁶⁷ Within this framework, Italian Somalis ended up being not only marginalized from the family and marriage customs of Somali society, but also from the normative principles of the new nation being constructed, by virtue which they were substantially foreigners by birth, language, culture and religion. Italian Somalis were therefore considered a minority and, as such, with the label of European Africans, were lumped together with Italians, Indians and Pakistanis in the official statistics prepared by the Italian trusteeship authorities⁶⁸ and later on by the Somali government on behalf of the UN.⁶⁹

In analysing the different types of marginalization experienced by the Italian Somalis, it is clear that the question of colour was combined with that of social status, which contributed significantly to determining their placement on the edge of the society of residence. In Italy, Italian Somalis clearly experienced a marginalization similar to those of the descendants of the former colonized people. The paradox was that the Italian Somalis in Somalia were associated by the Somalis with the former white colonizers for being Christian, culturally Italian and too light-skinned, while once in Italy they were considered no different from other Africans, because of their skin colour, despite their personal stories and citizenship status. This marginalization shows that in postcolonial Italy being Italian Somali was linked more to an idea of racial identity than to that of its opposite, namely the synthesis of different cultures. In this sense, 'Italian Somalis are a historical antecedent to the new Italians of foreign origin who question our traditional models of identity'.⁷⁰ Indeed, the interest in Somali culture and language as well as the commitment to many Italian Somalis, and of ANCIS itself, in favour of the peace process in Somalia, is clear testimony of their willingness to represent themselves in terms of a bridge between different cultures and to acknowledge their multiple belongings.

- 67 Ioan M. Lewis, 'Modern Political Movements in Somaliland', I, *Africa. Journal of the International African Institute*, 28.3 (1958), 252.
- 68 UNOR, 4th Committee Report, A/2933, 1954–1955.
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DANIELE COMBERIATI

7 Decolonization: Representing the Trusteeship Administration of Somalia

This chapter analyses representations of the AFIS and shows whether it was seen as a moment of continuity or rupture with the colonial period. It aims to show that this experience has been deployed by the Italian democratic state as a moment of rupture with fascism and at the same time as a democratic experience that unifies, limits, and stabilizes the idea of nation, despite the historical evidence that shows continuity with colonialism. The Italian government promised Somalis the decolonization of their country. For some – including the Italian Communist Party and Somali Youth League – this would come in the form of socialist or adjacent ideologies; for others, such as the Italian Christian Democrats Party, it would come from neoliberal markets. However, the postcolonial years in Somalia were marked by continuing exploitation, violence, and inequality, thus demonstrating Gayatri Spivak's point that political decolonization did not herald the end of the West's power over the globe.¹ While colonial relations of power receded, the older power relations simply took on more subtle, insidious, and even more potent forms, variously called 'neo-colonialism' or 'neo-imperialism'. Racialized forms of thought persisted among former colonizers and colonized people alike, which caused the self-negation, cultural annihilation, and feeling of marginalization of the latter group. Nor did decolonization in the political sphere bring a decolonization of consciousness or culture. 'We live' Spivak famously declared, 'in a post-colonial

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sarah Harasym, *The Post-Colonial Critic – Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 158–162.

neo-colonized world',² and the situation of AFIS is a perfect example of this oxymoronic statement.

Neocolonialism is a strategy employed by different political systems including democracies as a way of achieving not only geopolitical and economic goals, but also as a way of accomplishing social and political objectives within the 'metropole'.³ Representations of the experience of Italian democracy in Africa and its organization of 'new' Somalia indicates the attempts to reconstruct a 'new' Italian national identity in the post-war period, starting from the premises of race and colour.⁴ The colonial experience was placed on the margins of public discourse, considering it as exceptional or accidental, yet its links with questions of cultural identity remain essential to any understanding of the Italian state's exploitation of discourses of race and fear in its formulation of an 'other'. In this sense, the representation of the AFIS is important for reflecting upon the question of 'colonialism without colonies' or 'colonialism during peace'.

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate whether cultural representations of the AFIS saw this period as continuity or a break with respect to colonialism. After a description of historical formation and evolution of AFIS, I will focus on the representation of the AFIS Antonio Nediani's documentary *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* [Somalia, Ten Years Later] (1960),⁵ which was directed at the end of the trusteeship. The documentary offers a nostalgic view of the Italian colonization and the AFIS administration. Moreover, it underlines the 'diversity' between Italian and European colonialism, praising the supposed 'merits' of the former. Secondly, I analyse Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera* [Black Week] (1961) and the movie inspired by this novel – Giorgio Moser's *Violenza segreta* [Secret Violence] (1963) – in order to demonstrate that also in the alleged Italian anti-colonial

2 Spivak and Harasym, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 166.

3 Michael Bernhard, Christophe Reenock and Timothy Nordstrom, 'The Legacy of Western Overseas Colonialism on Democratic Survival', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48 (2004), 225–250.

4 Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani* (Milan: Mondadori; Le Monnier, 2014).

5 *Somalia, dieci anni dopo*, directed by Antonio Nediani, Italy, 1960.

literature and cinema after the end of AFIS still remains full of stereotypes and prejudices related to the colonial period.⁶ Thirdly, I focus on two novels: Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Clouds Over the Equator* (2017) – first published in Italian in 2010⁷ – and *Timira* by Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed (2012).⁸ These texts reconfigure the AFIS as a central rather than marginal event to understand contemporary Italian history, and they seem to suggest that this historical event is crucial to understand the present discrimination of immigrants and racism in Italy. Placing the history of AFIS at the centre rather than at the margins of Italy's contemporary history is a beneficial activity in order to rethink how race and national identity have been constructed in the postcolonial era.

The Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia (1950–1960)

The defeat of the Italian army by British and Commonwealth troops during the Second World War brought Italian colonial rule in Africa to an end. After the Allies' entry into Mogadishu (25 February 1941), Somalia was presented as the 'first colony to be freed' from the Nazi-Fascist rule according to the British information service.⁹ In reality, Britain strategically tried to control the former Italian colony by means of the Bevin-Sforza Plan, which attempted to create a Greater Somalia by means of a union between

6 Enrico Emanuelli, *Settimana nera* (Milan: Bompiani, 1961).

7 Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Clouds Over the Equator* (United Kingdom: Createspace, 2017); Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Nuvole sull'equatore. Gli italiani dimenticati. Una storia* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2010).

8 Wu Ming 2, Antar Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo meticcio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012).

9 Mohamed Adam Hussein, 'Language, National Consciousness and Identity. The Somali Experience', in Ioan M. Lewis, ed., *Nationalism & Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), 37.

the former Italian Somalia, the British Protectorate of Somaliland, and the Ethiopian Somali-speaking region of Ogaden and Hawd.¹⁰

After the failure of this compromise at the General Assembly of the United Nations in May 1949, Britain and Italy were obliged to discard their colonial or para-colonial plans and divide the former Italian colonies and agreed upon the separate independence of Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia. The UN resolution 289 of 21 November 1949 finally allowed the independence of the former Italian Somalia after a ten-year period of international trusteeship. Italy, the former colonial power, was asked to uphold the mandate over Somalia on behalf of the United Nations. The AFIS experiment was disappointing to many, as it maintained too much continuity with the former colonial rule despite the Italian declarations to manage the Somali trusteeship along lines very different from the recent past.¹¹

The period of the Trusteeship might even be described in terms of a struggle between many Italian Fascist and colonial-minded officers and a small number of others who mostly came from the diplomatic service and were sincerely committed to making a break with the past. The SYL (Somali Youth League, the party of Unity Somalia) indeed petitioned the UN Trusteeship Council to reject the Italian Trust Administration because 'most of the Italians, particularly the top-ranking officials, are coming from the staff of the former Colonial Ministry and the set-up of the administration is identical to the one in place during the fascist regime'.¹² Over the years which followed, the SYL made many compromises with the most progressive Italian officers and finally participated in the trusteeship experiment by taking part in the electoral campaign which they won. The overall achievements for Somalis during the trusteeship period are questionable. On one hand, the introduction of Somali officers into the State administration and the electoral process, which involved the first Somali parliament established in 1956 and the regional assemblies in 1958, constituted an improvement. On the other hand,

¹⁰ Antonio Maria Morone, *L'ultima colonia. Come l'Italia è tornata in Africa* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2011), 33–36.

¹¹ Morone, *L'ultima colonia*, 39.

¹² Morone, *L'ultima colonia*, 27.

the marked 'clanization' of the political system as well as of the newly transplanted institutions – for which both the Italian Trust authorities and the Young Somali nationalists must take some blame – had enduring damaging effects. Another negative outcome of this situation was the increasing monopolization that the SYL tried to impose on the political system – and which it finally achieved – transforming the democratic parliamentary model into an oligarchic one-party system.

In addition, there were internal problems between Somali institutions: Italy rejected what it perceived as 'archaic' rules stemming from the long history of different kinds of Somali administration, and opted for the imposition of its own political, educational and cultural models. Within the SYL, tension erupted between commitments either to Western modernity or to Islamic modernism that had its roots in Nasser's Egypt. The apparent inability of the past to supply valid solutions for the future brought about the need to search among foreign models, which were difficult to adapt to.¹³

At this point, it is important to consider the specificities of Italian cultural influences in Somalia. The most prominent form of Somali artistic culture is oral poetry. However, Italy tried to change this oral tradition into a bourgeois and written tradition. Education was considered by the Italian administration to be one of the most important pillars for the creation of a local middle class and the development of the country. However, in this field the challenges were enormous because in 1950 the level of illiteracy in Somalia was 99.4 per cent and, most importantly, a formal system of written Somali had not yet been developed.¹⁴ When Italy received the mandate for Trusteeship, it decided to adopt a five-year plan for the development of the education system with the cooperation of the UN Advisory Council of Somalia (UNACS) and the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹⁵ The adopted plan was based on three principles: to grant primary education access to the highest possible number of

¹³ Mohamed Trunji, *Somali. The Untold History 1941–1969* (Leicester: Looh Press, 2015), 9–61.

¹⁴ Angelo Del Boca, *La trappola somala. Dall'operazione Restore Hope al fallimento delle Nazioni Unite* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1994), 30.

¹⁵ Morone, *L'ultima colonia*, 163.

Somali children; to offer a means for the small segment of Somali elites to complete their education; and to form a highly specialized elite that could afterwards govern the country.¹⁶ In reality, the first point was an imposed condition from the UN upon Italy, and the goal was not fulfilled. At such moment, we bear witness to the persistence of a residual rhetoric of the 'civilizing mission'. The Italian 'civilizing mission' in Africa had two intentions in this context: to study and analyse the colonized people as a part of the Italian nation's commitment to 'scientific progress', and to promote the moral and intellectual superiority of the Italian nation in its colonized African territories.

In this period, *Il Corriere della Somalia* [The Newspaper of Somalia] (published in Mogadishu and funded by the Italian Ministry of Culture) remained the most read and well-known newspaper of the country.¹⁷ The newspaper published some unsigned articles on cinema, cultural representations of Somalia at the time (theatre, music, oral poetry), and on sporting events. The political situation was often neglected or considered in terms of general comments without any in-depth analysis. The main group of journalists, part of Italian community, knew that AFIS era was coming to an end. In the last three years of publication a nostalgic and paternalistic tone was in evidence in the longer articles. For example, in the main article of 28 November 1955, we can find an analysis on Italian foreign policy, through the focus on AFIS. The article, titled 'Il dinamismo della politica estera italiana' [The Dynamism of Italian Foreign Policy], shows the difference between Italian colonialism and English and French colonialism. Moreover, the author analyses successes and achievements obtained during AFIS in relation to other experiences of decolonization. This alleged diversity of Italy should be the reason for entering Italy among the most modern and rich countries.

16 Giuseppe Costanzo, *Problemi costituzionali della Somalia nella preparazione all'indipendenza* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1962), 128–140.

17 The newspaper archives of the Department of Somali Studies at Roma Tre University in Rome (the only Department of Somali Studies in Italy): <<http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/3897/1/1955.11.28-30.pdf>> (accessed 7 July 2017).

In other words, AFIS was used to erase two key aspect of the fragile political situation in Italy in 1949: first, Italy's democracy was barely a year old (during the bitterly fought referendum in 1948, the democrats won with just a margin of just 2 million votes); and second, there had been no 'Nuremberg process' at the close of the war in Italy in which reconciliation and indictment might take place.¹⁸ In Italy a general 'amnesty' was opted for and this means that a number of politicians who had worked with Mussolini and had important role in dictatorship secured power in the new Republic. Significant sections of the population who fought against Nazi-Fascist army – particularly those with socialist or communist allegiances and those belonging to the Communist Party – were totally ostracized from the exercise of political power. Some historians deemed this situation to be a kind of a moral defeat – after the military defeat – and linked these political transformations to the fragmentation of the nation's collective memory and understanding of its historical responsibility.¹⁹

AFIS played a significant role in Italy's presentation as a democratic and post-fascist country in foreign and internal politics. This importance might explain why this period has not enjoyed detailed analysis by Italian scholars. Luigi Gasbarri wrote the first article that focuses entirely on the AFIS experience: *L'AFIS: una pagina di storia italiana da ricordare* [AFIS: A Page of Italian History to Be Remembered] (1986).²⁰ This text adopts a nostalgic and paternalistic tone to describe the values and advantages of Italian administration. A more critical account of the AFIS mandate is proposed in Alessandro Aruffo's *Dossier Somalia* (1994),²¹ which underlines the crucial aspects of Somali society that hindered the achievement of the objectives indicated by the United Nations. These works focus mainly

18 Michele Battini, *The Missing Italian Nuremberg. Cultural Amnesia and Postwar Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3–12.

19 Giovanni De Luna, *La repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un'Italia divisa* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011), 29.

20 Luigi Gasbarri, 'L'AFIS, una pagina di storia italiana da ricordare', *Africa. Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazioni dell'I.S.I.A.O.*, 4 (1986), 73–88.

21 Alessandro Aruffo, *Dossier Somalia. Breve storia dal mandato italiano all'intervento ONU (1948–1993)* (Rome: DataneWS, 1994).

on the economic aspects of the AFIS and aim at assessing whether Italy achieved the objectives that the UN indicated in its resolution. The shortcomings of this economic approach are at least threefold. Firstly, there is no analysis of the reasons for the decision of the United Nations to concede the mandate to Italy. Secondly, the analysis of Somali society suffers from insufficient attention to the documentation. Thirdly, there is a lack of analysis of the clan organization of Somali society and of its transformation into a modern political organization based on political parties. Nevertheless, the most significant works that address some of the limitations of previous studies on the AFIS have appeared only in 2011: Antonio Maria Morone's comprehensive *L'ultima colonia. Come l'Italia è tornata in Africa 1950–1960* [The Last Colony. How Italy Came Back to Somalia] and Donatella Strangio's *The Reasons for Underdevelopment: The Case of Decolonisation in Somaliland*.²² These works demonstrate that Italy was unable to develop durable political and institutional solutions to the future of the Somali state and did not have sophisticated and adequate tools to exert its influence in an indirect way.

Colonial Nostalgia: Antonio Nediani's *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* (1960)

One of the first representations of the AFIS is Antonio Nediani's documentary *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* (1960). The director, Antonio Nediani, was an actor and a director during 1950s and 1960s in Italy, where he worked for the national television. The movie was produced by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it therefore reflected the political agenda of the Italian government.

22 Donatella Strangio, *The Reasons for Underdevelopment: The Case of Decolonisation in Somaliland* (Heidelberg: Physica, 2012).

Nediani's movie tries to underline the difference between Somalia 'before' and 'after' the arrival of Italian colonialism. Somalia was a poor land, where natural disasters devastated the land and enforced the people to live without a 'real' civilization. Somali people were nomads, and they are compared to animals, since they know just tribal laws. Italy totally transformed the country: Italian people discovered the potentiality of banana plantations and the fertility of the land. The narration is accompanied by a music inspired by an alleged 'African' style – percussions, dramatic silence to underline empty and large spaces, some male voices singing – which create an atmosphere full of sadness and mystery. Like some colonial movies and films, *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* presents the former Italian colony Somalia as a poor country but full of potentiality, which are now valorized thanks to the Italians. In this sense, the documentary affirms that Somali women are the most beautiful women in East Africa, and they are also the most emancipated among Muslim women. Somali bananas are the sweetest fruits in the world, particularly adapted for European market. Italians living in Somalia are presented as 'brava gente' [good people], claiming that Italy choose the best part of its own people to colonize and decolonize the country.

A second narrative strategy is to present the 'diversity' of Italian colonization. *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* affirms that Italians worked hard in Somalia not for their personal advantage, but to build an independent and strong country. The film also claims that after the independence, Somali people could exploit former farms and fruitful camps created by the Italians, thus describing African people as almost as parasites. In the movie, the 'voice over' tells about 'Italians', without underlining if it is referring to colonialism or the AFIS administration. Italians created laws to defend Somalis – and especially women – from the Muslim law, which obliged women to come back at home at 6 p.m. The 'voice over' declares explicitly: 'We gave much more than we received'. This paternalistic discourse is even more evident when the documentary argues that Italy 'protected' Somalis from the influence of France and England, because these countries just wanted to exploit its richness. Similarly, the 'voice over' tells also that, Italian army defends the borders with Ethiopia, to preserve local people from an external aggression.

In the second part of the documentary some interviews of Somali people studying in Italy and coming back to Mogadishu for the Independence are presented. An Italian journalist asks what is a peculiar feature of Italians, and a Somali man answers that simplicity and ability to communicate differentiate Italians from the 'cold' British colonizers. This 'informant native' is a person chosen to represent his community and his country, who confirms the stereotypes about themselves that the audience of *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* wants to hear.²³ The paternalistic vein of the documentary is fully shown at the end of the movie. The Italian ambassador in Mogadishu, Mario Di Stefano, affirms that Italy 'gave' independence to Somalia six months before a UN resolution. The Somali independence is presented just as a gift from Italy, not as a right or a necessity for this country.

Voiceless Subalterns: Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera* (1961) and Giorgio Moser's *Violenza segreta* (1963)

Enrico Emanuelli (1909–1967) was a noted writer and journalist in the 1960s and he knew the Horn of Africa because he worked there at the end of the 1950s as a journalist for the newspaper *La Stampa*. In *Settimana nera* (1961) there are three symbolic characters that represent three different ways to interpret colonialism: the protagonist (who remains nameless throughout the narration), and his fellow countrymates Farnenti and Contardi. While the main character apparently symbolizes the 'new' Italy and seems to consider Somalis as friends and as equals, Farnenti embodies the worst flaws of the old colonialist. He treats Somali people with contempt, considers himself as a 'boss', and exploits local women sexually.²⁴ His ideas about the end of AFIS and the beginning of independence of Somalia are

23 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 45.

24 Maria Pagliara, 'Desiderio di possesso e solitudine in *Settimana nera* di Enrico Emanuelli', *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 14 (1996), 297.

very negative: he cannot accept that Somalis will have power and he continues to mistreat them, because to 'treat well these people would always be useless'.²⁵ When Farnenti has to leave Mogadishu for two weeks for his work, he proposes to the protagonist to settle in his big house where his concubine and servant Regina lives – a Somali woman that Farnenti uses and exploits as an object.

During these two weeks, the most interesting part of the novel takes place: the protagonist undergoes a sort of transformation, and takes on the persona of the 'fanatic fascist' Farnenti.²⁶ Initially, he does not want to take advantage of Regina, and he considers the attitudes of his friend horrible and racist. However, Regina fascinates him, and after their first sexual intercourse he comes to enjoy the power of violence and possession. Indeed, Regina's passivity is one of the reasons for the arousal of the protagonist: 'Regina had a petite, smooth skin dry: my hand slid over her with the security of owning an object that someone had put at my disposal'.²⁷ Regina seems not to have a voice and a specific personality: she exists because she is dreamed, conceived and represented by the protagonist.

We can find in this brief summary of the plot two fundamental elements of the AFIS period: the differences between the new and the old generation of Italians in Somalia – the generation of colonialists, represented by Farnenti, and the newcomers who arrived during the period of the AFIS to work in commerce or in the institutions – and the persistence of the discrimination of the natives despite Italy's claim to have freed them from their patriarchal traditions. The main character, who is also the narrator, is aware that his attitude toward Regina is violent and wrong, but he maintains it. He is simultaneously ashamed and fascinated by what he calls his 'camouflage of violence'.²⁸ The description of the main character of the novel shows that the colonial fascination for violence and possession is still alive in the postcolonial period. As Barbara Tonzar argues, the novel describes the rationality of the protagonist – antiracist and theoretically

25 Emanuelli, *Settimana nera*, 107.

26 Emanuelli, *Settimana nera*, 21.

27 Emanuelli, *Settimana nera*, 32.

28 Emanuelli, *Settimana nera*, 202.

close to the Somali cause – in contrast with his instinctive side, which instead shares the excitement of the colonial enterprise with his country-mates.²⁹ *Settimana nera* signals the fact that the main character is tied to the dominant colonial mentality through the recurrent use of terms such as ‘hypocrisy’ and ‘deception’.

Contardi, a colleague of the protagonist, also plays an important role in the novel. He was a government official during the fascist regime and he was finally expelled from the Fascist Party because of his homosexuality. After the war, Contardi remained in Mogadishu and he tried to change his attitude with Somali people. However, he understands that such ambition is an illusion: ‘Even when you think you never used the gun [...], you realize that you used your hypocrisy of civilizing and your vices’.³⁰ This description of AFIS shows that new forms of exploitation, less direct and immediate, are hidden beneath a discourse of an alleged equality between Somalis and Italians in the postcolonial era.

Even if Emanuelli’s novel presents signs of exoticism and it does not feature self-conscious Somali characters, the evolution of the main character remains interesting and innovative for its time because it shows the doubts, the ambiguity, and the contradictions of Italians during the AFIS. Conversely, Giorgio Moser’s film adaptation of *Settimana nera*, *Violenza segreta*, shows a more constant reference to exoticism and underlines the primitivism of the female African object of desire. Indeed, Moser was specialized in documentaries that showed the mystery of faraway places, such as *Il continente perduto* [The Lost Continent] (1954), a documentary on China and Asia (winner of the Berlin Film Festival and the Jury Prize of the Venice Film Festival) and *L'impero del sole* [The Empire of the Sun] (1955), on Peru and Inca’s Empire. He chose the actor Giorgio Albertazzi as Enrico, the writer protagonist of *Settimana nera*. Albertazzi was a fascist militant, who in 1943 joined the Republic of Salò, the Nazi-Fascist regime in the north of Italy controlled by the German and Italian Fascist army. He never denied this decision, and he argued that he joined the Republic

of Salò to follow his ideals and in order to emulate his ‘hero’, the former Libyan Governor Italo Balbo.³¹ Albertazzi was very famous and celebrated not only in Italy but also in former colonial capitals, because his tours in Tripoli, Asmara, and obviously, Mogadishu were frequent. The decision to cast him as the main actor was aimed at representing an Italian colonizer who was very popular within most of the community of Italians in Mogadishu.

The soundtrack of the movie underlines the mystery, the fear, and the charm of the unknown through dramatic songs. The main song, *Idolo nero* [Black Idol] was written by Giovanni Fusco and Gino Paoli, one of the Italian iconic singers of the 1960s, and performed by Gino Paoli himself, with the orchestra of Ennio Morricone, probably the most important musician in Italian cinema. The song describes a future where Africa will be free, but in a generic and resolutely vague way. There is no reference to the Italian colonial experience in Somalia, and the narrator in the song is supposedly a young African, asking his mother if one day men will be equal. The refrain significantly stresses that: ‘A day will come / that also in Africa will not have color / they will be children of a professor / Yes, it may be just as well’. It is striking that despite the presence of so many established artists collaborating to the project, *Settimana Nera* had no success and was completely disregarded.

One of the reasons for the lack of success of this movie is that the Somali government changed the screenplay, in which Enrico Emanuelli also participated, because some scenes presented colonialism in a negative light. *Violenza segreta* was the first movie filmed in Somalia with an Italian production team. When a member of Ministry of the Information discovered that Giorgio Moser filmed the scenes that had been changed and deleted in the screenplay, the cinematographic crew was arrested, and the film was finally completed in Kenya.³² The reception of the film in Italy was also troublesome. A newspaper that addressed a Catholic readership

29 Barbara Tonzar, *Colonie letterarie. Immagini dell'Africa italiana dalla fine del sogno imperiale agli anni Sessanta* (Rome, Carocci, 2017), 129–143.

30 Emanuelli, *Settimana nera*, 125.

31 Fabio Poggiali, *Giorgio Albertazzi, l'ultimo imperatore* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), 53.

32 Valeria Deplano, ‘Settimana nera e Violenza segreta. Denuncia e rimozione dell’eredità coloniale negli anni Sessanta’, in Valeria Deplano, Gabriele Proglio and Lorenzo Mari, eds, *Subaltermità italiane* (Rome: Aracne, 2016), 132–133.

contested the accentuated eroticism of Regina, and criticized the morbidity of the director.³³ Moderate right-wing newspapers like *Il Giorno* criticized the representation of miscegenation and the relationship between a white man and an African woman.³⁴ Also alleged anti-colonialist magazines, such as *L'Unità*, the official newspaper of Italian Communist Party, considered the film as a general representation of Western exploitation in Africa, not necessarily linked to the AFIS experience.³⁵

Interestingly, no review focused on how the director stages a Somali character. Moser opted to emphasize chromatic contrast, and in the scenes with Regina and Enrico an intense white light accentuates her black profile, depicting her as a 'black Venus'. In other significant scenes, the blackness of her body is accentuated and then neutralized by dissolving it beyond white bed sheets. Regina always looks away from camera, as if her world was 'outside', and she speaks very little. Her representation is like that of the Canton children in *Il continente perduto* [The Lost Continent] (1955) and Peruvian people in *L'impero del sole* [The Empire of the Sun] (1955), who are portrayed as belonging to a primitive, instinctive culture. Regina is also visually associated with a bird in a cage, thus showing how Western culture cannot totally understand the 'primitive' element of African culture and uses the repression (the cage) to control it.

By emphasizing the chromatic contrasts between white and black characters and highlighting the exotic elements in the description of colonized subjects, the movie draws on the style of colonial cinema, especially that produced in the Imperial period (1936–1943). As Ruth Ben-Ghiat argues, these techniques were employed to justify Italian imperialist actions and justify Italy's civilizing mission.³⁶ *Violenza segreta* therefore presents a fundamental aesthetic ambiguity: it criticizes colonialism through a style that resembles colonial cinema, thus evoking the ideology connected to it. As Shelleen Greene argues, this ambiguity characterizes the movie and

- 33 Gian Maria Guglielmino 'Violenza segreta', *Gazzetta del Popolo* (2 March 1963).
- 34 Piero Bianchi, 'Ha due difetti ma una trovata', *Il Giorno* (2 March 1963).
- 35 Ag. Sa, 'Violenza segreta', *L'Unità* (10 March 1963).
- 36 Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

can be seen as a visual example of the 'Italian postcolonial consciousness'.³⁷ The complexity of Italy's relation with colonialism is well represented in *Violenza segreta* by the relationship between Enrico and Regina: although the movie attempts to show a critique of colonialism 'on the level of sexual fantasy', 'the Enrico-Regina relationship remains firmly within the confines of colonizer/colonized binary'.³⁸ The erasure of Regina's presence can be seen in the final credits of the film, where we discover that the actress playing Regina has no surname: she is just called Maryam. This element is a perfect symbol of the movie: Italians can reflect on colonization and AFIS, but subaltern Somalis are still not allowed to speak or be heard. They can be described, dreamed, imagined, but their point of view in any description of AFIS is missing up until the 2000s when writers of Somali origins started to describe this period.

AFIS as Neocolonialism: Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed's *Timira* (2012) and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Clouds Over the Equator* (2010)

The novels *Clouds over the Equator* (2017) by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel and *Timira. Romanzo Meticcio* (2012) by Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed are perhaps the two texts that have discussed more extensively the legacy of the AFIS administration in Somalia, but other works by Italian authors of Somali origins such as Cristina Ali Farah, Igiaba Scego and Kaha Mohamed Aden also describe this period.³⁹ *Clouds over the Equator* describes the story of Amina, a Somali woman, and her *meticcio* daughter Giulia during the

- 37 Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects. Between Italy and Africa. Constructions of Racial and National Identity in Italian Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 80.
- 38 Greene, *Equivocal Subjects*, 86, 87.
- 39 For an analysis of these writers' works and their description of the AFIS administration, see Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2015).

AFIS in Mogadishu. *Clouds over the Equator* shows that *missioni* [mixed race children] were often marginalized by colonial power but also by local communities. They were abandoned and taken in by the missionary centres where they grew up together. Ramzanali shows that often nuns exploited the mixed-race children, making them work hard, insulting them and considering them to be 'children of sin'.⁴⁰ The reasons for this segregation can be found in the legacy of three laws of the fascist era, which respectively denied Italian nationality and education for mixed race (Law 1019 of 1936), punished interracial unions (Law 880 of 1937), and considered mixed race people biologically inferior (Racial Laws of 1938).

The result of these different views of Somalia creates a complex narrative mosaic. Temporal plans are constantly interwoven into the protagonists' dialogues because the author urges us as readers to consider the past's relations with the present. The flashbacks in the plot emphasize this undertaking and the records of the past feed into the present life of the protagonists. Indeed, Simone Brioni argues that '*Clouds over the Equator* contributes to re-imagine national spaces, and provides a powerful representation of the condition of those who straddle different cultures'.⁴¹ *Clouds* describes how cultural relations based on colour's and race's expectations: Giulia and Amina live in Mogadishu, they are all mixed-race, but they are considered differently primarily in terms of their colour and race by Italians and Somalis. Their lives are linked to both the present and the past, because the changes in Somali civil life have interrupted a series of relationships with their friends. The character of Guido Giardina – a small business owner, former Italian soldier in the colony, and one of the few males in the novel – finds himself forced to confront at once his past and his present – a son he has never known and a son who is about to be born – is the perfect narrative and poetic synthesis of the difficulty for the Italian man to find original role in the new countries: the colonial period has finished, but some colonial relationships remain, and in general the new power structure represents a new model of exploitation.

40 Shirin, *Clouds Over the Equator*, 89.

41 Brioni, *The Somali Within*, 7.

Shirin Ramzanali Fazel stresses that the old ways of colonialism are even present in the streets of Mogadishu:

Normally people would nod to each other or exchange greetings. White women in stilettos would grab their partners' arms: mixed-race couples avoided holding hands in public, for the legacy of fascist laws prohibited inter-racial relationships. It was also not done for Somali women to be seen in the street with men: that would be thought shameful.⁴²

This quotation shows that the space of the city is totally organized by racial and gender segregation: some places are forbidden for Somali women, and the clothes show the diversity between people. Racial laws have rewritten the body of the city and the country, to mark on the streets signs of division and segregation. It is clear that the concepts of 'mixed race' and 'hybrid' become the key to escaping from the subject of hegemonic appropriation: once most Somali Italian subjects reached Italy, they found themselves in a context which tried to assimilate them, without making the effort to understand their multiple identity.

Timira was written by Wu Ming 2, a member of the collective group of authors Wu Ming, and Antar Mohamed, a Somali Italian writer living in Bologna. *Timira* describes the life of Antar Mohamed's mother, Isabella Marincola, a Somali Italian actress in the 1950s in Rome, enjoying for the first time a trip to Somalia – a country that she has never really known because she moved from Mogadishu at the age of six in 1956 during the period of the AFIS. She discovers a country whose story is linked to that of Italy, but hopes for its future independence. Her view of Somalia is interesting because Isabella, in Somalia and in Italy, is a 'non-conformist' woman: neither totally Italian, nor totally Somali, she had some problems to find a role in the Italian movies because she was not 'totally' black and exotic.

The description of the AFIS reveals the ambiguity of Somalia at the time. Isabella Marincola went officially to Mogadishu to accompany her husband, who was a journalist. In fact, it was during this trip that she met for the first time her mother and her Somali family, and thus she discovered another part of her identity. The scene in the narrative, which includes a

42 Shirin, *Clouds Over the Equator*, 10.

gathering of a number of characters in the city's most exclusive location of the ballroom, remains one of its most interesting. The protagonist realizes immediately the racial and gender division at work in this society: 'Italian women danced only with Italians and even by mistake they approached Somali men. A typist from Perugia took me aside and explained to me that Somali women were divided into two subgroups: the wives of Italians, and the *sciarmutte*, the whores of Italians'.⁴³ Somali society in the 1950s is clearly still riddled with colonial prejudices: Isabella's voice is used to narrate some important events of Somali history, such as the law of 1953, when Italians, scared that SYL win too wide elections, decided to limit the vote in the city excluding rural residents.⁴⁴ She also describes the situation of Italian companies, which were ready to use AFIS laws to expand their monopoly and exploitation.⁴⁵

The authors have chosen to insert some original documents (Isabella Marincola's identity card, a poem by arrested Somali militant against AFIS – Timiro Ukash – and a transcription of television news) in order to give added substance to the cultural analysis being undertaken in the novel. These insertions, named 'Archivio storico' [Historical Archive], are fundamental to understanding the way the collective writing Wu Ming operates. The authors mix fictional narration and archival documents to create 'unidentified narrative objects'.⁴⁶ Wu Ming's *54* can be seen as a model of *Timira*: while the beginning of *54* argues that "Postwar" means nothing,⁴⁷ *Timira* seems to say that there is no one postcolonialism because the colonialism is not finished.

In *Timira* there is an interesting article from the journal *Rinascita* [Renaissance], a communist magazine founded in 1944 by the chief of

43 Wu Ming 2, Mohamed, *Timira*, 275.

44 Wu Ming 2, Mohamed, *Timira*, 292.

45 Wu Ming 2, Mohamed, *Timira*, 296–297.

46 Wu Ming, *New Italian Epic. Letteratura, sguardo obliquo, ritorno al futuro* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), 7.

47 Wu Ming, *54*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside (London: William Heineman, 2005), 3. This novel was originally published in Italian: Wu Ming, *54* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti.⁴⁸ The article, written by Giorgio Assan, a journalist who specialized in Italian colonialism, shows the continuity between former Italian politics and the 'new' form of government during AFIS. Assan describes in a very precise way the funds obtained from the public budget of the AFIS and the corruption of Italian officials; indeed, most of the funds for Somalia were used for financing Italian bureaucracy.

Isabella Marincola/Timira (her name in Somali) is distinguished by her multi-faceted identity – Somali, Italian, and *meticcia* – which at the same time results in a hybrid language. She comes to represent a new type of 'Italian-ness' so different from the mono-cultural, mono-religious model that is frequently held up as the widely expected norm. Analysing their stories allows us to appreciate how Italian identities are built through association and community rather than from a sense of exclusion. *Timira* seems to suggest that Somalia needs to reconstruct its cultural life by looking back at its past, which has been going by a civil war that started in 1994. No one from Mogadishu can take comfort from having fought against the colonial power or from having finally gained their independence. Isabella's story and her position as an outsider in Italy show that racial, cultural, national homogeneity was forged in Italy by creating a foreign enemy. Italian colonialism and postcolonialism are thus linked with nation building because the new and old colonies are needed to secure internal consensus.⁴⁹

Rethinking AFIS, Rethinking Decolonization

The recent novels that represented the AFIS administration such as *Timira* and *Nuvole sull'Equatore* challenge the concept of decolonization, by showing continuity between colonialism and the postcolonial era. These texts

48 Wu Ming 2, Mohamed, *Timira*, 325–326.

49 Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione. Stampa e razzismo nell'Italia di fine Ottocento* (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 21–38.

have shown that this experience is not marginal in Italian history, and Italy had been simultaneously a postcolonial and a neocolonial country. Moreover, the representation of this period shows that the issue of segregation and racism not only permeate fascist culture and the present Italian multicultural society, but are a continuum in modern Italian history. The AFIS administration was a way for Italy to recreate its 'sphere of influence' in Africa and to acquire power and legitimacy in the new world order. The civilizing rhetoric of this operation was similar to the one employed during colonialism. The documentary of Antonio Nediani *Somalia, dieci anni dopo* (1960) presents with nostalgia the end of the Italian colonial period. Moreover, texts like Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera* (1961) represent the continuity between colonialism and AFIS, and the exoticism and eroticism that are present in Giorgio Moser's film *Violenza segreta* (1963) testify to the legacy of a colonial imaginary in the 1960s. Giorgio Moser and Enrico Emanuelli consider the independence of Somalia as a right thing, but they cannot hide their colonial approach. Works like *Nuvole* and *Timira affina*, as Spivak maintained, that decolonization cannot be considered the end of colonialism, but just a new form of influence. The liminal and ambiguous political state of AFIS and its absolute exception within the process of European decolonization offers interesting ways to rethink colonialism, decolonization and postcolonialism.

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PART III

Transnationalism

LORENZO MARI

8 Heroes: A Transnational Reconsideration of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan and Omar al-Mukhtar in Literature and Film

Transnationalizing Italian Postcolonial Studies

Since their establishment in the global academic agenda, postcolonial studies have always experienced a paradoxical situation, as the investigations in this field have been mostly produced in restricted academic environments in the former metropolitan centres – thus marginalizing those contributions coming from the former colonies, as well as from the rest of the world. This is also true for Italy. Initiated by research on the Italian military history in Africa,¹ Italian postcolonial studies have gradually extended its focus, in order to include investigations on the colonial and postcolonial history of the former Italian colonies, and specific analyses in the field of memory studies,² gender studies,³ and literature written by postcolonial and diasporic authors.⁴

¹ Giorgio Rochat, *Il colonialismo italiano* (Turin: Loescher, 1974); Luigi Goglia, Romain Rainero, Giorgio Rochat and Enzo Santarelli, *Omar al-Mukhtar e la riconquista fascista della Libia* (Milan: Marzorati, 1981).

² Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005); Gabriele Proglia, *Memorie oltre confine. La letteratura postcoloniale italiana in prospettiva storica* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2011).

³ Giulia Barrera, *Dangerous Liaisons: Colonial Concubinage in Eritrea 1890–1941* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1996); Giulietta Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: una storia di genere* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2007); Nicoletta Poidimani, *Difendere la "razza". Identità razziale e politiche sessuali nel progetto imperiale di Mussolini* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 2009).

⁴ Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture. Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); Daniele

Most of these studies seem to share some crucial concerns, whose recurrence informs both the field of Italian postcolonial studies and its discursive and material limits. One of these questions is the amnesia about the Italian colonial past. This phenomenon consolidated in the decades between 1960, with the end of Italian colonial domination overseas and the arrival of massive flows of migrants to Italy, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Paul Gilroy has noticed in the case of Britain, the presence of immigrants has revived much of the present interest in the colonial and postcolonial history shared by Italy and its former African colonies.⁵ Regarding Italy's 'colonial amnesia', Mia Fuller has convincingly argued that

discussions about Italian colonialism and memory [...] focus nearly exclusively on the memories of *Italians* – perpetuating the very self-centredness that shaped and limited the colonial view. [...] Italians' own aspersions concerning the 'repression' of Italian colonial memory are often well-meaning and self-accusatory [...] Nonetheless, this recurrent emphasis gets in the way of curiosity about the experiences of non-Italians, and the inverse question has barely been posed: is the Italian period *rimosso* in the former colonies? What have the ruptures and continuities of history and memory been, *there*? How do the formerly colonized remember their time as colonial subjects; what do they prefer to forget; and in what ways are their memories relevant to their present and future – if they are at all?⁶

While Fuller seeks to deconstruct the limitation of Italian postcolonial studies to Italian cultural and political history by resorting to the memories of the formerly colonized subjects, her argument sticks to that 'colonizer-colonized' dichotomy which is an ideological legacy of colonialism itself.⁷ Transnational insights on the cultural and political trajectory of Italian

Comberiati, 'La Libia postcoloniale: frammenti narrativi e iconografici', *Narrativa* 33–34 (2012), 69–80; Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in Minor Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2015).

⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁶ Mia Fuller, 'Italy's Colonial Futures: Colonial Inertia and Postcolonial Capital in Asmara', *California Italian Studies*, 2.1 (2011), <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4mb1z7f8>> (accessed 31 May 2017), emphasis in the original.

⁷ Abdul JanMohamed, *The Manichean Aesthetics. The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

colonialism in Africa and its aftermath, on the other hand, could expand that dichotomic focus, contributing to a more complex and articulated scenario.

Following from these considerations, the goal of this chapter is to reconsider the colonial and postcolonial history of anti-Italian anticolonial struggles in two African colonies such as Somalia and Libya – focusing, in particular, on the historical, cultural and political representations of two anticolonial leaders: Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, 'the Sayyid' (1856–1920), in Somalia, and Omar al-Mukhtar in Libya (1858–1931). My analysis demonstrates that narratives and representations concerning 'the Sayyid' and Omar al-Mukhtar have been circulating worldwide and should then be examined on a transnational level.

Such 'transnational turn' in postcolonial studies has been previously suggested in few cases, starting perhaps with the global resonance of the Adwa battle (1896). As argued by Getachew Metaferia,⁸ the transnational impact of the Ethiopian victory was so strong that it was still felt during the second Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in 1935. In both cases, what had struck the international audience was the longstanding resistance of Ethiopia to European colonial forces, which had been able to subjugate the rest of the continent except Liberia.

Compared to Ethiopian or Liberian history, however, those anticolonial struggles which developed against an established colonial domination had a different impact on the symbolic level and, consequently, a different transnational reach. In this case, in fact, the analysis of the narratives and representations of the historical figures and events related to anticolonial movements should be conducted along both colonial and postcolonial history, often including the political and cultural influence of geopolitical relationships between the former colonies and metropolitan centres in the postcolonial era. As a consequence, these cultural histories are heavily

⁸ Getachew Metaferia, 'Ethiopia: A Bulwark against European Colonialism and its Role in the Pan-African Movement', in Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia, eds, *The Battle of Adwa. Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism* (New York: Algora, 2005), 205–209.

marked by those peculiar ideological aims which are specifically related to more recent political goals.

A paradigmatic example can be provided by the ideological undertones of the post-9/11 'global war on terrorism' about political violence in the postcolonial world. Recalling and often vulgarizing David Rapoport's 'wave theory',⁹ anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa have been frequently considered as 'political/nationalist terrorism', in continuity with present-day terrorism (to be distinguished from the former exclusively on the grounds of the 'religious/secular' dichotomy). At the same time, several historical figures, previously branded as 'terrorists' in the Euro-American world for their participation in the armed struggle, have been fully rehabilitated, as exemplified at best by the case of Nelson Mandela.¹⁰

In addition, these narratives and representations can reach different audiences: while links between Ethiopia and the Pan-African constellation all around the world were established after the battle of Adwa, the other anticolonial struggles were generally limited, in the first place, to their national contexts. When these narratives and representations are made available to a transnational audience, the ideological and material needs of different communities inevitably add to the process of negotiation, if not manipulation, of memory which had previously involved the postcolonial national and diasporic communities, as well as the former metropolitan centres.

This is particularly evident when it comes to the figures of two anticolonial heroes such as Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, 'the Sayyid', in Somalia, and Omar al-Mukhtar, in Libya, whose cultural and political legacies appear to be diachronically stratified and synchronically plural. Differently from postcolonial 'founding fathers', their figures are not directly related to Somali and Libyan nation-building processes and their impact on national

- 9 Rapoport's 'wave theory' considers terrorism as a global phenomenon, whose structural recurrence can be described as the succession of four waves of terrorism ('anarchist', 'anticolonial', 'new left' and 'religious' terrorism, respectively). See David Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 2001', *Anthropoetics*, 8.1 (2002).
- 10 Elleke Boehmer, 'Postcolonial Terrorist. The Example of Nelson Mandela', *Parallax*, 11 (2005), 46–55.

imaginaries shift away from immediate ideological investments, such as those processes of 'gendering the nation'¹¹ which are commonly associated with 'founding fathers'. However, as they are represented as anticolonial heroes – therefore embodying a set of values and inspiring action in time, both as political intervention and cultural production¹² – their figures have been appropriated in different ways, leading to a peculiar interplay among their representations in the political and in the cultural fields.

Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, or Anticolonialism as Religious Madness (and Beyond)

The anticolonial struggle of 'the Sayyid' in Somalia covered the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although Somalia was then divided into two colonies, his campaign was mainly directed against the British Somaliland, while the treaty of Illig (1905) granted non-belligerency to the Italian Somaliland.¹³ The conflict – which was named 'the Dervish war' after the self-definition chosen by the religious and military group led by Mohammed Abdulle Hassan – ended in 1920, with the bombing of Taalex, the last fortress occupied by the 'Dervishes', and the death of 'the Sayyid', caused by influenza.

These events were accurately reported in the colonial archives, as well as in the colonial historiography and ethnography, both in the Italian and the British Somaliland. Transnational since its beginning, the figure of 'the Sayyid' was mainly constructed by a colonial perspective, granting

- 11 Anne McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review* 44 (1993), 61–80.
- 12 Laurence van Ypersele, 'Héros et héroïsation', in Laurence van Ypersele, ed., *Question d'Histoire Contemporaine* (Paris: PUF, 2006), 149–168.
- 13 The colonial domination over the present territories of Somalia and Somaliland was constituted by two different protectorates, the Italian Somaliland (in two phases: 1889–1941 and 1950–1960) and the British Somaliland (1884–1960).

him the derogatory definition of *Mad Mullah of the Somaliland*, which is also the title of the one of the most important colonial reports about that period, written in 1923 by the British officer Douglas Jardine. This text was translated into Italian in 1928, as *Il mullah del paese dei Somali*, by the Italian officer Mario Quercia: although the Italian title appears to omit the reference to madness, the 'Editor's Note' underlines the fact that the story of 'the Sayyid' is to be considered as a 'highly interesting and didactic story'¹⁴ also for the Italian audience.

In this regard, it is commonly held that the derogatory label of 'Mad Mullah of Somaliland' was directly given to Mohammed Abdulle Hassan by the colonial establishment, in order to deprecate the anticolonial struggle of the 'Dervishes' as a mainly fanatical religious enterprise.¹⁵ However, the definition of 'Mad Mullah' had already been used by the Somali internal opposition to 'the Sayyid', which was constituted by two Somali clans heavily contrasted by the Dervishes (the Isaaq and the Dolbahante) and, in general, by those Somali Muslims who did not share his specific religious views.¹⁶ These disputes started way before the beginning of his anticolonial struggle, as shown by the quarrel that 'the Sayyid' had in Berbera in 1895 with the local adepts of the Sufi preacher Mohammed Salih. Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, who had studied with Mohammed Salih in person during his *hajj* in Mecca, supported a different interpretation of Salih's preaching – causing religious disputes within the different Somali Muslim communities both during and after his life.¹⁷

In view of this controversial history, it can be fairly argued that the characterization of 'the Sayyid' as the 'Mad Mullah of Somaliland' – that is,

14 Douglas Jardine, *Il Mullah del paese dei Somali* (Rome: Sindacato Italiano Arti Grafiche, 1928), 6.

15 Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad Abdille Hasan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Abdi Sheikh Abdi, *Divine Madness: Mohammed Abdulle Hassan of Somalia (1856–1920)* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

16 Fiona Sparrow, *Into Africa with Margaret Laurence* (Edmonton: ECW Press, 1992), 72–74.

17 John Slight, 'British and Somali Views of Muhammad Abdullah Hassan's 'Jihad', 1899–1920', *Bildhaan*, 10.7 (2011), 17.

as a crazy and bloody warrior, mainly driven by a fanatic religious credo – was so strong that it eventually managed to manipulate and 'silence' the anticolonial political goals of the Dervish movement. As a matter of fact, such a political and cultural memory was divisive also among the Somalis, both in the colonial and postcolonial era. First of all, those clans which did not share the cause of the Dervishes dedicated several oral poems to the denigration of 'the Sayyid' – a notorious oral poet himself, in Somalia – keeping alive their opposition for several decades.¹⁸ Secondly, the memory of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan's struggle proved to be convenient to the official rhetoric of Siyad Barre's authoritarian regime, ruling over Somalia from 1969 to 1991. The religious motivations of 'the Sayyid' had led him to fight any identity claim which was specific to one Somali clan to the detriment of the others, sharing a markedly anti-tribal rhetoric with Barre's nationalist government.

This ideological emphasis on 'the Sayyid' as a national, rather than as a religious, hero is aptly elaborated in one of the most renowned literary texts written in Somalia and in the Somali language after decolonization: *Aqoondaaro waa u nacab jacayl* [Ignorance is the Enemy of Love] (1974) by Faarax Cawl. The plot of this 'Somali Romeo and Juliet'¹⁹ is based on the tragic love story between Cali Maxamed Xasan, or Calimaax, and a woman called Cawrala Barre. Whereas the name of Calimaax is directly linked to the genealogy of 'the Sayyid', the name of Cawrala Barre carries along a clear identification with Siyad Barre's regime. Their love affair, therefore, points at the ideological closeness of the anticolonial struggle of the 'Sayyid' and Barre's postcolonial regime in their fight against particular ethnic or clannist claims. The dramatic end of their love story, however, fully displays the political ambiguity of this invented political nexus: although the novel was written by an enthusiastic supporter of Barre's regime such as

18 Francesco Antinucci and Axmed Faarax Cali, *Poesia orale somala: storia di una nazione* (Rome: Ministero per gli Affari Esteri-Dipartimento per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo, 1986), 43.

19 Fatima Fiona Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel and the Idea of Home* (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 125.

Faarax Cawl, no happy ending seems to be available for the couple and, by virtue of 'national allegory',²⁰ for the political fate of postcolonial Somalia.

Brought to the forefront by Somali colonial and postcolonial culture, this contested and divisive legacy was downplayed in that body of postcolonial literature written in English and published by major publishing houses, which could benefit from a larger transnational reach. In fact, authors such as Nuruddin Farah and Margaret Laurence, suggested some radically different interpretations of the figure of 'the Sayyid', combining the evocation of his anticolonial struggle with some contingent and often idiosyncratic political aims. This kind of evocation was usually positive, primarily focusing on the symbolic power of the anticolonial struggle as a transnational force, rather than on the critical representation of the history of 'the Sayyid' and the Dervishes in relationship with the history of colonial and postcolonial Somalia.

The Somali-born author Nuruddin Farah (born in Baidoa, Somalia, in 1945) dealt with the figure of 'the Sayyid' on two occasions, providing the transnational community of his readers with two slightly different perspectives on that history. In his fifth novel, *Close Sesame* (1983), the protagonist, the elder Deeriye, makes repeated reference to 'the Sayyid' as a model for his own political struggle. Deeriye fights both against the Italian colonial regime during its youth, and against Siyad Barre's regime at the end of his life. Whereas the first reference seems to be quite in line with the anticolonial struggle led by 'the Sayyid', the second one reverses the ideological celebration of this figure in Faarax Cawl's earlier novel, implicitly pointing at the distance between the anticolonial movement of the Dervishes and the policies of Barre's regime. In this case, Deeriye's opposition to Barre might be directly related to the writer's own criticism of the postcolonial regime, leading Nuruddin Farah to exile since 1976.

In addition, 'the Sayyid' is also mentioned together with other national heroes, within a transhistorical and transnational celebration of those great men – Shaka Zulu, Nasser, Ataturk, Nkrumah, Cabral, Garibaldi, Lenin,

20 Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88.

Cabdunnassir, Gandhi, the Sayyid' who 'have one thing in common: the shaping force of their life has been resistance'.²¹ Here, the figure of 'the Sayyid' is torn from his specific national context, in order to allow a comparison with other figures from world history which is merely grounded on their shared 'resistance' to oppressive power.

Besides, as African and non-African national heroes are quoted together with other historically prominent revolutionaries, this clearly envisions a transnational community of readers, being articulated all over the world. Those references have also several political implications, as they might be considered as promoting Pan-Africanism – similarly to the Pan-African movements stirred by the battle of Adwa – as well as the political perspectives of other historical movements. First of all, the Soviet Revolution evoked through Lenin stands as a counterpoint to Siyad Barre's purportedly socialist regime, thus demystifying its political rhetoric. Secondly, the reference to Giuseppe Garibaldi constitutes a sort of 'writing back'²² to the Italian colonial regime, recalling that Italian unification had been possible only through the transnational emancipatory struggle led by this man.²³ Thirdly, the reference to Ataturk might be considered as a textual strategy to downplay the importance of religion within anticolonial struggle, resorting to the paradigmatic figure of secularism in Muslim politics.

Nuruddin Farah mentions 'the Sayyid' also in his eleventh novel, *Links* (2004). The reference is directly placed within the context of Somali civil war:

They came across a zinc wall on which someone had scrawled: 'Dal-dalo maidkaada, nagna!' Jeebleh rendered this to himself as 'Take away your corpses and leave our country!' He knew where the line came from. His memory galloping, he recited lines from a poem composed at the turn of twentieth century by Somalia's greatest poet, Sayyid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan:

21 Nuruddin Farah, *Close Sesame* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 147.

22 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

23 Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

I have no cultivated fields, or silver
 Or gold for you to take!
 The Country is bush.
 If you want wood and stone,
 You can get them in plenty,
 There are also many termite hills. [...]
 All you can get from me is War.
 If you want peace, go away from my Country.

Then a silence, which neither was prepared to break, came between them, like a referee stopping a fight. And into the silence walked a rabble of armed youths, like extras in a film about Mexican bandidos.²⁴

In this excerpt, the protagonist of the novel, Jeebleh, establishes a trans-historical connection between the anticolonial struggle of 'the Sayyid' and the aftermath of the so-called 'Battle of Mogadishu'. The latter took place on 3 October 1993, opposing the Somali armed faction led by Mohammed Farah Aidid to the US troops involved in the Operation Restore Hope (1992–1993) during the Somali civil war. Whereas the fight against external intervention in Somalia appears to be similar, Farah also points out that the 'rabble of armed youths' here described – like several other armed gangs taking part in the generalized violence of civil war – seems to act 'like extras in a film about Mexican bandidos'. When compared to the memory of the political position of the 'Sayyid' through the quotation of one of his oral poems, he clearly hints at the Somali amnesia about the anticolonial struggles held in the country, whereas that memory would have endowed these 'armed youths' of clearer political and cultural goals.

If Nuruddin Farah's references to the Sayyid are qualified both on a transnational and trans-historical level, the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence (1926–1987), who lived in East and West Africa from 1950 to 1957, exploited this symbolic potential of the figure of 'the Sayyid' with significantly different outcomes. Her first engagement with the legacy of 'the Sayyid' is in her first book, a collection of translations of Somali folk literature titled *A Tree for Poverty* (1954), where she translates Mohammed

24 Nuruddin Farah, *Links* (New York: Riverside Books, 2004), 269–270.

Abdulle Hassan's *gabei* 'To a Friend Going on a Journey',²⁵ thus privileging the characterization of 'the Sayyid' as an oral poet over the figure of the anticolonial hero.

Laurence's subsequent essay shifts towards a clearer celebration of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan's political action, as it can be appreciated in her essay 'The Poem and the Spear', included in the collection *Heart of a Stranger* (1976).²⁶ Here, 'the Sayyid', recalled both as an oral poet and a warrior, is merely represented as a symbol of political resistance, overlooking the historical and cultural specificities of his struggle. In this regard, Laurence exclusively focuses on the criticism of the colonial representations of the 'Mad Mullah of Somaliland' – rather than on other aspects of that historical period – pointing out how authors such as Douglas Jardine described him in negative, if not derogatory, terms:

Jardine's description of the battles is factual and drawn from reports of the time, but this picture of the 'Mullah' is flamboyant in the extreme. The British appear to have seen the Sayyid as a kind of grossly exaggerated Arabian Nights figure – unvaryingly and diabolically cruel, a profligate of the worst order, a man who spent his days and nights in riotous living, a glutton and lecher in the grand style.²⁷

In addition, Laurence celebrated the struggle of 'the Sayyid' and the Somali Dervishes alongside the political movements led in Canada by two Métis leaders such as Louis David Riel (1844–1885) and Gabriel Dumont (1837–1906) as a part of Native American revindications against the colonial regime enforced by European settlers. This comparison might be once

25 *Gabei* is a typical genre of Somali oral poetry, where individual affects usually dominate over political issues. Interestingly, the same poem by 'the Sayyid' was used by the British-Somali author Nadifa Mohamed as an epigraph to her first novel, *Black Mamba Boy* (2009). There, the reference to 'the journey' – as represented in the novel by the protagonist's odyssey in East Africa and Europe in the 1930s and 1940s – completely takes over any political implication related to the figure of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan.

26 Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003), 44–76.

27 Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, 52.

again considered as an idiosyncratic political move by the author, to be primarily framed within Laurence's 'Canadian feminist nationalism',²⁸ which she developed after her return to Canada and, in particular, in her 'Manawaka cycle' of novels, from *The Stone Angel* (1964) to *The Diviners* (1974). Such an appropriation also implies a peculiar rapprochement of the Muslim faith of 'the Sayyid' and Laurence's own Christian credo:

The Sayyid might have recognized, through the stonewall of separate dogma, the words of St. Paul, excessively proud and yet in some final way humble – 'I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith'. [...] This at least can be said of [the 'Sayyid']. He fought a good fight; he finished his course; he kept the faith.²⁹

Looking retroactively, this invented nexus works both on a transnational and a trans-historical level, and it might be considered as shaping Laurence's whole writing career. Indeed, as Laurence herself argued she 'had come back home to Canada via Africa, both physically and spiritually'.³⁰

Both in Nuruddin Farah and Margaret Laurence's works, then, 'the Sayyid' is mainly recalled as a symbol of strenuous political resistance, while the historical, cultural and political interpretations of his legacy always turn out to be enmeshed with other perspectives, coming not only from Somali history, but also from Canadian or world history. Interestingly, this peculiar reshaping of the historical and cultural figure of 'the Sayyid' does not find any proper match in the Somali postcolonial and diasporic literature written in Italian, where the references to 'the Sayyid' are almost completely absent. In fact, this memory seems to

28 Debra Dudek, 'A Timeless Imagined Prairie. Return and Regeneration in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka Novels', in Alison Calder and Robert Wardbaugh, eds, *History, Literature and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 235–258.

29 Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, 53.

30 Margaret Laurence, 'Ivory Tower or Grassroots? The Novelist as a Socio-Political Being', in Daymond Douglas and Leslie Monkman, eds, *Canadian Novelist and the Novel* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1981), 57.

be neglected in favour of at least another Somali national hero: Hawo Taqo, a female nationalist fighter, affiliated to the Somali Youth League (SYL), who was killed during a riot in Mogadishu in 1948. Hawo Taqo has been quoted by the Italian authors of Somali origins Kaha Mohamed Aden, in the theatrical performance *La quarta via* [The Fourth Road] (2007),³¹ and Igiaba Scego in her short story 'Identità' [Identity] (2008)³² and in her personal essay *La mia casa è dove sono* [Home is Where I Am] (2010).³³

While both these authors mainly focus on Somali political resistance as gendered, a slightly different reference can be found in *Timira. Romanzo Meticcio* – a novel co-authored by Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed – concerning the robbery and smuggling of Hawo Taqo's statue during Somali civil war.³⁴ A later remark, where this robbery is quoted together with the smuggling of an equestrian monument dedicated to 'the Sayyid',³⁵ clarifies the goal of the reference, which aims to underline the fragility of political and cultural memory in present-day Somalia. This passage is directly related to civil war and its economic, cultural and political impact, recalling Nuruddin Farah's similar position in *Links*, but stressing the figure of Hawo Taqo together with 'the Sayyid' – and widening the perspective to the whole political and cultural memory of anticolonial struggle being wiped away by civil war.

31 First performed at Cinema Teatro Lux, in Pisa (Italy), on the 28 September 2007, *La quarta via* was also used as a starting point for the eponymous documentary, *La quarta via. Mogadiscio, Italia*, starring Kaha Mohamed Aden, directed in 2012 by Simone Brioni, Ermanno Guida and Graziano Chiscuzzu, and co-written by Simone Brioni and Kaha Mohamed Aden. See also Simone Brioni, 'Tradurre l'identità nell'Italia post-coloniale: *La quarta via* di Kaha Mohamed Aden', *Altreitalie*, 41 (2011), 110–124.

32 Igiaba Scego, 'Identità', in Flavia Capitani and Emanuele Coen, eds, *Amori bicolori* (Rome; Bari: Laterza: 2008), 24.

33 Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010), 23.

34 Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo Meticcio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), 23.

35 Wu Ming 2 and Antar, *Timira*, 42.

Omar al-Mukhtar, or the Never-ending Story of a Multiple Struggle

If the representations of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan appear to be globally positive, the memory of the Libyan anticolonial leader Omar al-Mukhtar seems to be slightly more complex and fraught with tensions, both in Libya and on a transnational level. Similar to what had happened with the transnational resonance of the battle of Adwa (and more consistently than in the case of the 'Sayyid'), Omar al-Mukhtar's religious and political engagement in the anticolonial struggle had reached a global audience since its very beginning. In fact, he was appointed by Sidi Muhammad Idris al-Mahdi al-Senussi – to be later recognized as King Idris I of Libya (1951–1969) – as the military leader in the Senussi region as early as in 1922. However, it was only with his murder by the Italian colonial administration in 1931, that the figure of Omar al-Mukhtar fully revealed its potential to stir Pan-Islamic anticolonial feelings in the Muslim communities all over the world. Such a possibility was often repressed both by colonial regimes and the anticolonial non-Islamic nationalist movements.³⁶

As Frank Dhont has convincingly argued in the case of the reception of the news of Omar al-Mukhtar's murder in Dutch Indonesia, anticolonial nationalist movements clearly intended to downplay the importance of their religious components in favour of homogenous national identities and memories:

[T]he 'Heroes of Indonesia' are those who conform to an inclusive ideal allowing a multitude of groups and people to feel part of the nation-state of Indonesia. Those who rebelled against the Indonesian state after the Second World War and also tried to use the political potential of Islam as mass-motivator were summarily excluded from national memory.³⁷

36 Hala Khamis Nassar and Marco Boggero, 'Omar al-Mukhtar: the formation of cultural memory and the case of the militant group that bears his name', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 13.2 (2008), 201–217.

37 Frank Dhont, 'The Historical Figure of Omar al-Mukhtar and Islamic Martyrdom in Indonesia', *Al-Jami'ah*, 50.1 (2012), 80.

The transnational reception of Omar al-Mukhtar's murder is significantly different from the reception in postcolonial Libya, where Omar al-Mukhtar's memory was the primary object of a consistent ideological investment during Muammar Gaddafi's rule (1969–2011). Muammar Gaddafi's uneven and changing combination of different political positions with Islamic principles, characterizing his rule since its very beginning,³⁸ brought him to repeatedly celebrate Omar al-Mukhtar's anticolonial legacy. One of the latest and most famous occasions was Muammar Gaddafi's 2009 visit to Italy, hosted by the Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi: on his arrival in Rome, Muammar Gaddafi wore a military suit with a picture of Omar al-Mukhtar pinned to his chest, whose implicit aim was to strategically exploit the memory of the Italian colonial past in order to build a stronger position for Libya in the economic and security agreements planned by Berlusconi's and Muammar Gaddafi's governments at the time.

Muammar Gaddafi's regime, however, also tended to downplay any element which could be effectively related to Omar al-Mukhtar and 'fuel sympathy towards the Senussi as well as the ambitions of independence for Cyrenaica'.³⁹ On the ideological level, Muammar Gaddafi's political discourse was characterized by on the celebration of 'the popular resistance to Italian imperialism',⁴⁰ and it created an ambiguous position for national heroes, such as Omar al-Mukhtar himself, whose reference was meant to contribute to Muammar Gaddafi's rhetoric only on specific occasions. These ambivalences were hardly reconcilable, reaching their apex in the latest decade of Muammar Gaddafi's rule over Libya: while 'the monument built to commemorate [Omar al-Mukhtar's martyrdom] in Benghazi was demolished in 2000 by an order from Muammar Gaddafi',⁴¹ a celebrative rapprochement of Omar al-Mukhtar and Saddam Hussein's

38 Moncef Djaziri, *État et société en Libye* (Paris, Harmattan, 1996); Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

39 Hala and Boggero, 'Omar al-Mukhtar', 204.

40 Lisa Anderson, 'The Development of Nationalist Sentiment in Libya 1908–1922', in Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih and Reeve Simon, eds, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 73.

41 Hala and Boggero, 'Omar al-Mukhtar', 203.

figures was brought forth by the regime and its accolades after Saddam Hussein's murder, in 2006.⁴² This ambiguity did not prevent the revolt leading to Muammar Gaddafi's fall and murder, in 2011, from recalling Omar al-Mukhtar as a shared historical point of reference, as it eventually happened in some Libyan regions, particularly in Cyrenaica.⁴³

On the other hand, Omar al-Mukhtar's legacy in postcolonial Italy was not only silenced within the already mentioned processes of 'colonial amnesia', becoming, instead, the target of active censorship. This happened to Mustafa Akkad's film *The Lion of the Desert* (1981), a Hollywood biopic about Omar al-Mukhtar which has been blocked in various ways by the Italian censorship until 2009, when it was screened by Sky Cinema Classics upon Muammar Gaddafi's visit to Italy. In other words, the movie appeared on a pay-per-view TV channel, whose goal clearly transcended cultural and political aims towards the commercial exploitation of the political sensationalism created by Muammar Gaddafi's arrival in Rome.

As early as in 1990, Gian Piero Brunetta had noticed that Italian censorship was especially aggressive with those non-Italian films which dealt with Italian colonial past: *The Lion of the Desert* shared its fate with Lutz Becker's documentary *The Lion of Judah* (1981), about the fascist invasion of Ethiopia (1935–1936), and Ken Kirby's BBC documentary *Fascist Legacy* (1989). The Italian public broadcasting company RAI obtained the exclusive rights to screen both documentaries in Italy, but it has never showed them.⁴⁴ With reference to these two films, Italian censorship seemed to operate on different grounds. Blending Italian footage with other footage, mostly coming from a Soviet team working in Ethiopia of the time, Becker's documentary was based on an unprecedented mix of Italian and non-Italian perspectives on the war; the cultural and political impact of these images

42 Hala and Boggero, 'Omar al-Mukhtar', 204.

43 On the other hand, the three different 'Omar al-Mukhtar Brigades' operating in Lebanon in 1986, in Palestine in 2000 and Iraq in 2006 shared an exclusively nominal relationship with Omar al-Mukhtar's legacy (Hala and Boggero, 'Omar al-Mukhtar', 212).

44 Gian Piero Brunetta, 'L'ora d'Africa nel cinema italiano', in Gian Piero Brunetta and Jean Gili, *L'ora d'Africa nel cinema italiano* (Trento: Grafica, 1990), 37. *Fascist Legacy* was partially broadcasted by the Italian private broadcasting company La7 in 2004.

was also heightened by the common sense according to which the documentary genre is 'more real' than other fictional genres.⁴⁵ Akkad's film, on the other hand, was probably perceived as dangerous for the opposite reason – that is, for its fictional emphasis on an African anticolonial hero, which was also reinforced by the worldwide aura created by a Hollywood production and distribution. Omar al-Mukhtar's role was played in the film by Anthony Quinn, who was already a very popular actor in Italy for his appearances in films such as Federico Fellini's *La Strada* [The Road] (1954), David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), or Michael Cacoyannis' *Zorba the Greek* (1964). On a merely symbolic level, on the other hand, Italian censorship might have acted in a similar way, as what is striking in the titles of both films is the shared reliance on the imagery of the lion – representing anticolonial struggle through the highly ambivalent yet productive symbol of animal force and pride.

Despite Italian censorship, *The Lion of the Desert* benefited from a transnational reach which was not equalled by any other cultural representation of Omar al-Mukhtar's struggle. Only the novels and short stories (translated so far into at least thirty-five languages) by the Libyan writer Ibrahim al-Koni (born in 1948 in Ghadames), might constitute a partial exception. Ibrahim al-Koni, however, rarely makes direct reference to Omar al-Mukhtar and, when he does, Omar al-Mukhtar always plays a minor role in the narrative or in the thematic structure of his works.

As noticed by Daniele Comberiati,⁴⁶ this might be explained through Ibrahim al-Koni's own political position, which was equally critical of the Italian colonial domination and Muammar Gaddafi's postcolonial regime. His representations of al-Mukhtar's anticolonial struggle, therefore, are mainly aimed to recall readers that both dominations coincided in the oppression of the Libyan people, especially the Tuareg people, which Ibrahim al-Koni genealogically belonged to. There are at least two works by Ibrahim al-Koni, also translated in Italian, where this double criticism is more evident: *Nazif al-hajar* [The Bleeding of the Stone], translated in

45 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality. Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

46 Comberiati, 'La Libia postcoloniale', 77.

Italian as *Pietra di sangue* in 1998, and the collection of short stories *Watan al-ru'a al-samawijja wa qisas ukhra* [The Land of Heavenly Visions and Other Stories], translated as *La patria delle visioni celesti e altri racconti dal deserto* in 2007.

In the former, the protagonist is the young Bedouin shepherd Asouf, whose vegetarian habits, forged by his father's Sufi credo, clash with the cruelties embodied or committed by the omnivorous characters he meets. Whereas the criticism of the Italian colonial domination is made visible through the conflicts between Asouf and a couple of Italian characters, the attack on Muammar Gaddafi's regime is implicitly rendered through Asouf's characterization as a vegetarian shepherd, as his life and beliefs are threatened by alien forces, in the same way as Tuareg culture has been threatened with disappearance by Muammar Gaddafi's policies.⁴⁷ If references to Omar al-Mukhtar seem to be almost absent, Asouf's depiction as a heroic representative of his people, whose cultural and religious beliefs are endangered both by colonial and postcolonial policies, might certainly be interpreted as analogous to al-Mukhtar's 'martyrdom'.⁴⁸

The presence of Omar al-Mukhtar is undoubtedly clearer in *Watan al-ru'a al-samawijja wa qisas ukhra*, where the direct references to his figure are mixed with the description of Sheikh Ghuma, whose character seems to be a fictional double of al-Mukhtar himself. Frequently quoted, or even included in the narrative in some of the short stories included in the collection, Sheikh Ghuma shares with Omar al-Mukhtar both his characterization as a charismatic leader and the historical experience of the defeat in the battle of Kufra (1931), which was a decisive step towards al-Mukhtar's imprisonment and death sentence.

Ibrahim al-Koni also recalls Omar al-Mukhtar through the denigration of his longstanding enemy, the Italian general Rodolfo Graziani, in the 1982 short story 'Ila ayna ayyuha al-Badawi' [O Bedouin, Where Are

47 Steven Tristan Webb, 'Mali's Rebels: Making Sense of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad Insurgency', in Nicholas Scott Romaniuk and Steven Tristan Webb, eds, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Modern War* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2016), 149–168.

48 Hala and Boggero, 'Omar al-Mukhtar', 202–204.

You Going To?], translated in Italian as 'Dove vai, beduino? Dove?'. In the opening lines, the narrator explicitly blames the lack of memory of the protagonist, a Bedouin who keeps singing joyously as if he had never known anything about Graziani, or Hitler.⁴⁹ In this passage, the narrator does not only establish a transnational and trans-historical nexus between Graziani and Hitler as two major negative figures in world history. Moreover, he criticizes the emergence of historical and cultural amnesia within the Tuareg people, who will not be able to resist to the fragmentation of their cultural and religious beliefs – as also shown in *The Bleeding of the Stone* – if they do not know anything about their colonial past.

This link between the anticolonial and the antifascist struggles, as aptly embodied by Omar al-Mukhtar, has been recently reactivated by a small cultural festival and political initiative, called 'Resistenze in Cirenaica' [Resistances in Cyrenaica], held in the eponymous quarter of Bologna since 2015. Starting from the peculiar heritage of this quarter, whose cultural and political memory is related both to colonialism and Italian antifascist 'Resistenza', various collectives of Italian writers – including the already mentioned Wu Ming – and artists have promoted readings, meetings and publications to discuss the heritage of anticolonial and antifascist movements in contemporary Italy and worldwide.⁵⁰ However local in its origins, 'Resistenze in Cirenaica' is one of the few cultural and political initiatives aiming to reassess the legacy of anti-Italian anticolonial movements and antifascism in Italy on a national and transnational level, after decades of heavy censorship in Italy on the cultural productions dealing with these issues.

49 Ibrahim al-Koni, *La patria delle visioni celesti*, 139–140.

50 Omar al-Mukhtar is recalled in the two publications (titled *I Quaderni di Cirene* [Cyrene Notebooks]) originated from the festival: a portrait of him is on the cover of the first issue (March 2016), while the second issue (June 2016) includes a poem by Rajab Bu-Huwayish, one of al-Mukhtar's fellows in the Libyan anticolonial struggle, in Italian translation.

Transnational Memories, Transnational Heroes

In conclusion, the analysis of texts such as Nuruddin Farah's *Links* and Ibrahim al-Koni's 'O Bedouin, Where Are You Going To?' shows that historical and cultural amnesia of colonialism is a major problem not only in Italy, but also for formerly colonized people. These texts underline an alternative memory of colonialism from the ideological elaboration of this period that was promoted by the Somali and Libyan postcolonial regimes. Moreover, both Nuruddin Farah and Ibrahim al-Koni give a complex and transnational representation of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan and Omar al-Mukhtar in their works, which goes far beyond the dichotomy between the memories of the colonizers and the memories of the colonized people. Specifically, Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame* includes the former in a long list of heroes of world history. On the other hand, Ibrahim al-Koni's collection *The Land of Heavenly Visions and Other Stories* employs Omar al-Mukhtar's fictional double, Sheikh Ghuma, as a specific model for the Tuareg struggle for material and cultural survival.

In addition, a transnational perspective also includes other representations of these anticolonial heroes, such as the ones provided by the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence, about 'the Sayyid', and the Syrian-born director Mustafa Akkad, about Omar al-Mukhtar, which reached different audiences. Laurence's translations and essays primarily targeted a Canadian audience, establishing a tight relationship between the Somali anticolonial struggle and the revolts led by the Métis leaders in Canada and including it within the framework of a renewed Canadian nationalism. If this operation might appear markedly idiosyncratic, Akkad's *The Lion of the Desert*, on the other hand, benefited from Hollywood worldwide distribution, reconnecting with the transnational reception of Omar al-Mukhtar's legacy at the time of his murder.

As for the ideological and political implications of these works, it might be fairly argued that all these representations share a reductive take on the figures of these two anticolonial heroes, as they focus on Mohammed Abdulle Hassan and Omar al-Mukhtar merely as positive symbols of political resistance to oppression, without indulging much in the specificities of

their actions. Notwithstanding the political aims of such a metonymical shift, their presentation has not been matched so far by any political action which could be compared with the Pan-African feelings stirred by the resistance of Ethiopia to colonial invasion. A partial exception might be made only for the political and military opposition to Muammar Gaddafi in the final years of his regime, often quoting Omar al-Mukhtar as a historical reference.

On the other hand, this shift has been very productive in the recent and present cultural production, on a transnational level. Postcolonial authors such as Nuruddin Farah, Margaret Laurence, Ibrahim al-Koni and movies such as *The Lion of the Desert* have contributed in many different ways to keep the cultural and political memories of Mohammed Abdulle Hassan and Omar al-Mukhtar alive. In addition, the emphasis on 'resistance', rather than on the historical specificities of the Somali and Libyan anticolonial struggles, has opened up paths for the celebration of alternative heroic figures, as it has happened in Somali Italian literature with the substitution of 'the Sayyid' with Hawo Taqo as the main historical reference for Somali anticolonial struggle. By doing so, all these authors have reached different communities of readers and audiences, adding different meanings to the interpretations of the heroic figures of African anticolonial struggle and eventually breaking the 'colonizer-colonized' dichotomy still haunting postcolonial cultures.

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9 Diaspora: A 'Postcolonial' Migration? An Analysis of Eritrean Mobility Trajectories

In many studies on postcolonial cultures in Italy, the presence of migrants is taken as an ineludible reminder of colonialism in Italian society. Migrants embody the 'postcolonial other' that crosses borders and extends struggles and inequalities rooted in colonial history to metropolitan societies.¹ This perspective has been fruitful in understanding labour relationships among Italian families and immigrant domestic workers,² the legacy of the colonial imaginary about women in contemporary gender politics in the Horn of Africa,³ and the persistence of a monolithic definition of national belonging in Italian public discourse.⁴ Through the inspiring works of postcolonial writers, contradictions and implications of a long-forgotten page in Italian history have been brought to light.⁵

- For instance, see Michele Mellino, 'Italy and Postcolonial Studies: A Difficult Encounter', *Interventions*, 8.3 (2006), 461–471; Sandro Mezzadra and Federico Rahola, 'The Postcolonial Condition: A Few Notes on the Quality of Historical Time in the Global Present', *Reworking Postcolonialism: Globalization, Labour and Rights* (2015), 36–54.
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- Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2015); Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Post-Colonial*

This chapter aims to contribute to the understanding of contemporary movements of subjects from former Italian colonies to the metropole, by analysing to what extent Eritrean diaspora to and through Italy is a 'postcolonial' one. First, I reconstruct the history and the main features of the Eritrean diaspora, highlighting that these multiple migrations cannot always be linked back to colonialism. Likewise, contemporary desires to move onwards from Italy stem from other factors – arguably not directed related to colonialism – which have to do with the composition of the Eritrean diaspora, European welfare inequalities and transnational family expectations about the suitable final destination. Then, I analyse Eritrean refugees' strategic and selective use of the memory of colonialism while discussing their attempts to cross international borders. Their claims for the right to be received and welcomed are thus 'postcolonial' as they contest contemporary borders on the basis of historic responsibilities and a common past. My use of this adjective needs clarification. First, postcolonial migrations are those resulting from events and connections directly stemming from colonialism. Secondly, this adjective often refers – in postcolonial studies – to the legacy of colonialism in the global neocolonial order.⁶ The overstretch of the postcolonial label to a variety of discussions only partly related to colonialism has been criticized as it dehistoricizes a past event, by assuming a ubiquitous concatenation between what happened during and after colonialism.⁷

The ethnographic material presented in this chapter derives from two years (2012–2014) ethnography along the shifting corridor that connects Eritrea to Europe. Starting from the investigation of Eritrean refugees' everyday life in Rome, Milan and Genoa, I moved to Eritrea to explore their ties with their left-behind kin, and to observe the reasons pushing my

Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

- 6 See for instance the essays collected in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 7 Jean-François Bayart, 'Les études postcoloniales, une invention politique de la tradition?', *Sociétés Politiques Comparées*, 14 (2009), 1–46.

research participants to embark into dangerous border crossing throughout Africa and Europe. Following their informal networks, I then researched their daily lives in Sudan and Ethiopia (in camps and urban environments) while trying to arrange for their next steps towards Europe. Although my research has mainly concerned migration tactics and the underlying social and cultural mechanisms enabling mobility at different stages of the migration process, throughout my fieldwork I encountered biographic instances, narratives and attitudes that made me reflect upon the legacy of Italian colonialism in my research participants' trajectories. This chapter is the result of these reflections.

Beyond the Metropole

Links with former colonizing centres and subsequent cultural, historic and linguistic similarities are often mentioned among the most crucial factors for migrants to choose a destination over another.⁸ Although many authors have highlighted the limits of considering colonialism as a de-facto magnet for new migrations,⁹ a shared colonial history remains an important aspect to understand the directions of many contemporary migration flows. Language commonalities and well-established networks are key facets to explain the determination of those migrants who are

- 8 Marc Hooghe, Ann Trappers, Bart Meuleman and Tim Reeskens, 'Migration to European Countries: A Structural Explanation of Patterns, 1980–2004', *International Migration Review*, 42. 2 (2008), 476–504; Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas and Mark J. Miller, eds, *The Age of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).
- 9 Michael Collyer, 'When Do Social Networks Fail to Explain Migration? Accounting for the Movement of Algerian Asylum-Seekers to the UK', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31.4 (2005), 699–718; Jan-Paul Brekke and Grete Brochmann, 'Stuck in Transit: Secondary Migration of Asylum-Seekers in Europe, National Differences, and the Dublin Regulation', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28.2 (2015), 145–162.

stuck in Ventimiglia trying to reach France, or the long-standing migration of Pakistani and Indians to the United Kingdom.¹⁰

As people from former colonies are not the most numerous among the immigrants who live in Italy, this country stands as an exception in the landscape of contemporary European migration and asylum flows. Libyans, Eritreans, Somalis are only a relatively small number among the significant inflow of migrants who have come to Italy in the last thirty years,¹¹ which have turned Italy from emigration into immigration country.¹² Adding to this statistical evidence, people coming from former Italian colonies rarely want to stay in Italy, if they arrive there. Despite well-established Eritrean communities and fifty years of shared colonial history, Eritreans seek to reach other European countries. Interestingly, this is less true for other national groups of asylum seekers, such as Bangladeshi or West Africans who tend to stay in Italy, at least for a little longer.¹³ By comparing the figures of the Italian ministry between those who have reached Italy in 2014–2015 and those who have sought asylum there, it is possible to see that less than 2 per cent of those

- 10 See for instance Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, 'Materializing Post-Colonial Geographies: Examining the Textural Landscapes of Migration in the South Asian Home', *Geoforum*, 35.6 (2004), 675–688.
- 11 ISTAT reports that in January there were about 9,400 Eritreans, 7,800 Ethiopians, 8,200 Somalis and 2,000 Libyans in Italy over a total foreign population of 5 million. Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 'Statistiche demografiche ISTAT', *istat.it* <<http://demo.istat.it/str2016/index.html>> (accessed 29 September 2017).
- 12 Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 'I dati del censimento 2011', *istat.it* <<https://www.istat.it/it/immigrati/tutti-i-dati/dati-del-censimento>> (accessed 29 September 2017); IDOS Centro Studi e Ricerche, *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2016*, *dossierstatistica.it* <<http://www.dossierimmigrazione.it/comunicati.php?tipo=schede&q=132>> (accessed 29 September 2017).
- 13 Data on sea arrivals are available at ISMU, 'Irregolari e sbarchi in Europa e in Italia - Presenze', *ismu.org* <<http://www.ismu.org/irregolari-e-sbarchi-presenze/>> (accessed 29 September 2017). Data on asylum seekers are available at Ministero dell'Interno - Dipartimento per le Libertà Civili e l'Immigrazione, 'I numeri dell'asilo', *libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it* <<http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/i-numeri-dell-asilo>> (accessed 29 September 2017).

Eritreans who landed in Italy filed their case there.¹⁴ In 2015, among 19,500 Eritrean arrivals, only about 700 sought asylums in Italy.¹⁵ This trend seems opposite to most migration flows from former colonies to the metropole. Investigating this exception can offer the opportunity to discuss the importance and the limits of a postcolonial approach in the understanding of contemporary migrations.

Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen, and Gert Oostindie argue that a distinction should be made between postcolonial and other categories of migrants.¹⁶ Although they acknowledge the difficulties in distinguishing postcolonial migration from labour and welfare-related migration, they maintain that postcolonial migrants are usually groups who enjoy some specific legal rights as well as linguistic, cultural and even family ties with the metropolitan society.¹⁷ Following this categorization, past but even more contemporary Eritrean migrations to Italy can hardly be considered postcolonial. Indeed, Bosma, Lucassen, and Oostindie refer to Italy as one of those

- 14 Milena Belloni, "Solo di passaggio": l'Italia nelle rappresentazioni e nelle pratiche di mobilità dei giovani eritrei', *Mondi Migranti* 2 (2016), 249–267.
- 15 This trend seems to have changed in 2016, when over 7,000 Eritreans applied for asylum over a total of around 20,000 arrivals. This could be due to the implementation of the relocation mechanism within Europe, and to the increased difficulties in escaping biometric identification on arrival.
- 16 Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen and Gert Oostindie, eds, 'Introduction', in Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen and Gert Oostindie, eds, *Postcolonial Migrants and Identity Politics: Europe, Russia, Japan and the United States in Comparison* (London: Berghahn Books, 2012), 1–22.
- 17 However, the authors advance some important remarks on the common applications of this category. First of all, postcolonial migration is not only from former colonies to metropolitan countries. As they argue the process of decolonization has produced movements of people in different directions. As instance, they mention the partition of India and Pakistan that triggered the displacement of over about 10–12 million people. They also remark that most attention in postcolonial migration studies – dominated by discourse on power unbalance and subalternity – has been given to migrants originally from former colonies rather than the movements of colonial elites and return of settlers.

colonial powers that had less to do with postcolonial migrants at least at a first instance.¹⁸

An analysis of the history of Eritrean migration to Italy can offer further ideas about this point. Initially well-established connections with the metropole had allowed a significant number of women to move to cities like Rome, Milan and Bologna to work as domestic assistants. This flow was partly rooted in pre-established contacts with Italian families who used to live in Eritrea. In other cases, this migration was driven by the demand among middle-class families of Eritrean domestics who were deemed to have been educated throughout colonization and more apt to understand the needs of Italians.¹⁹ Although some labour agencies, such as Agenzia Maria, used to facilitate the recruitment of young women in Asmara, Eritreans have never enjoyed privileged legal rights to move to the metropolis compared to other immigrants.²⁰ Quite paradoxically, Eritreans who arrived in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s fleeing from war and violence back home were not even granted the refugee status, as Italy at the time still retained the geographic clause of the Geneva convention. This clause excluded non-Europeans from the right to seek asylum in the country.²¹

Even if colonization and decolonization occasionally led to displacement – I think of the consequences of land expropriations which took place in the early 1890s in Eritrea²² – the beginning of the Eritrean diaspora does not date to those times. In fact, the end of the Italian rule did not correspond to the end of colonization for Eritrea. After a brief British administration (1941–1945), Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia and then unilaterally annexed by emperor Haylä Səlassə in 1962.²³ Although this

18 Bosma, Lucassen and Oostindie, 'Introduction', 18–19.

19 Sabrina Marchetti, *Black Girls*

20 Jacqueline Andall, 'Second-Generation Attitude? African-Italians in Milan', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28.3 (2002), 389–407.

21 See Cristopher Hein, *Rifugiati: vent'anni di storia del diritto d'asilo in Italia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010).

22 Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

23 Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

annexation was variably received by different groups in Eritrea, many perceived it as another colonization from an external power. The subsequent thirty-year long war to achieve independence was the main traumatic event which led to the massive flight of Eritrean people. This war could be seen as shaped on nationalistic goals and images rooted in the colonial experience,²⁴ but it would be reductive to interpret it as a direct result of the decolonization process. Its protractedness can be seen instead as the result of international geopolitical interests and shifting political alliances across the Red Sea at the time.²⁵

Moreover, the movement of people triggered by the war was not mainly directed towards Italy. Most people remained in neighbouring countries, with Sudan becoming the recipient of thousands of Eritrean refugees.²⁶ Those who moved to Europe rarely aimed at staying in Italy. This was due to the legal difficulties in acquiring legal status and to a well-founded perception that labour market opportunities were limited in Italy.²⁷ Girmay, a sixty-year-old Eritrean who had lived in Italy for more than thirty-five years, remembered the time when he arrived in Milan. Even then, he narrated, all his friends and compatriots aspired to move forward mostly to Germany. He decided to stay because his uncle had a restaurant in Milan where he could work and eventually that became his own business.²⁸

24 Gianpaolo Calchi Novati, 'Italy and Africa: How to Forget Colonialism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 13.1 (2008), 41–57; Okbazghi Yohannes, 'The Eritrean Question: A Colonial Case?', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 25.4 (1987), 643–668.

25 Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, 'American Foreign Policy and the Horn of Africa: A Cold War Reaction?', *Northeast African Studies* (1980), 31–42; George W. Shepherd, 'Dominance and Conflict on the Horn: Notes on US-Soviet Rivalry', *Africa Today*, 32.3 (1985), 7–21.

26 David Smock, 'Eritrean Refugees in the Sudan', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 20.3 (1982), 451–465.

27 Jacqueline Andall, 'Second-Generation Attitude? African-Italians in Milan', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28.3 (2002), 401–402.

28 I interviewed Ghirmay in Addis Ababa in 2014, when he came to visit his nephew who had escaped from Eritrea a year before. I then met him again in Porta Venezia in Milan in 2014 and in 2015.

Yet, some Eritreans did stay in Italy. It is almost impossible to provide reliable figures on their number, as some of them had registered as Ethiopian citizens when Eritrea did not yet exist as a state, or have acquired Italian citizenship over time. However, the sources of the 1980s and early 1990s estimated around 3,000 Eritreans with a legal permission to stay in Milan and other 3,000 in Rome. Ethnic restaurants and Orthodox Coptic churches are present in neighbourhoods such as Porta Venezia in Milan and the *rione* [historic district] Esquilino in Rome since the 1970s.

When the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea ended in the early 1990s, the flow of escapees from the latter country slowed for a few years. However, the renewed conflict with Ethiopia allegedly over a border dispute triggered new mass displacement from 1998 onwards.²⁹ This conflict produced long-term implications on the economic and political structure of Eritrean society. While Eritrea has progressively been isolated in the international scene,³⁰ the regime has become more repressive and the economy weaker. Younger generations have had to pay the highest price of these transformations, as they have been obliged to work for an indefinite amount of time in public duties with little compensation.³¹ All the above factors lie at the roots of the continuous outflow of people (mostly young men) from the country. Although not everyone has the resources to reach Europe, those who arrive in Europe do not want to stay in Italy,³² like those young Eritreans who arrived in Italy in the 1980s.

29 Jon Abbink, 'Creating Borders: Exploring the Impact of the Ethio-Eritrean War on the Local Population', *Africa* (2001), 447–458.

30 On the origins and implications of Eritrea's diplomatic isolation see Richard Reid, 'Caught in the Headlights of History: Eritrea, the EPLF and the Post-War Nation-State', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 43.3 (2005), 467–488; Redie Bereketeab, 'The Eritrean Diaspora: Myth and Reality', in Ulf Johansson Dahre, ed., *The Role of Diasporas in Peace, Democracy and Development in the Horn of Africa* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2007), 79–96.

31 Nicole Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, "Dreams Don't Come True in Eritrea": Anomie and Family Disintegration due to the Structural Militarisation of society', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 51.1 (2013), 139–168.

32 See Belloni, "Solo di passaggio", 249–267; Belloni, 'Refugees as Gamblers: Eritreans Seeking to Migrate through Italy', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 14.1 (2016),

These different generations and groups of Eritreans in Italy, as well as in other countries – most notably Germany, United States and Canada – constitute the bulk of what is commonly referred as the Eritrean diaspora. However, this unifying term may only be partly useful to grasp the complexity of Eritrean populations abroad. A brief analysis of the composition of the Eritrean diaspora is necessary to understand some of the less evident reasons – not related to colonialism – why Eritrean migrants do not want to stay in Italy.

A Diasporic Community? Shifting Solidarities and Homeland Orientations among Eritreans in Italy

Initially defined around the ideal-typical experience of the Jewish diaspora, the connotations of the term diaspora have been widely expanded and applied to a variety of groups, identities and transnational experiences.³³ The stretch in the use of the word has often been recognized as problematic due to its progressive loss of a clear meaning. Against this background of semantic dispersion and blurredness, Rogers Brubaker suggests to consider this term as a stance which some groups take to formulate their identities, political claims and loyalties – a category of practice – rather than an analytic category that identifies specific groups.³⁴ However, some scholars seem to agree on a few main defining characteristics of a diaspora, including the dispersion – often caused by a traumatic event – homeland-orientation and boundary-maintenance across generations.³⁵ These traits have historically

104–119; Giuseppe Grimaldi, 'Tra sbarco e approdo: liminalità e valore performativo del transito dei richiedenti asilo eritrei ed etiopi nel quartiere di Milano Porta Venezia', *Mondi migranti*, 2 (2016), 229–247.

33 James Clifford, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3 (1994), 302–338.

34 Rogers Brubaker, 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28.1 (2005), 12.

35 About the main common characteristics of a diaspora see Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008); William Safran,

been used to define the dispersed groups of Eritreans living abroad, although internal divisions and shifts in orientation have more recently complicated the unitary image of the 'Eritrean diaspora'.

As previously described, Eritreans have scattered around the world since the 1950s, with a significant degree of international dispersion. They have also been described as constituting tight communities strongly linked to the homeland by political alliances and cultural practices. Studies on those communities residing in Milan and Rome in the 1980s highlight the lively political mobilization in support of the independence struggle.³⁶ For example, scholars who worked on Eritrean communities in Canada noticed their deep-rooted sense of distinct national and cultural identity.³⁷ This sense has been kept alive by the institutional transnational engagement of the Eritrean state abroad,³⁸ and by the common practice to spend holidays in the homeland even among second generation expatriates.³⁹

However, the above image of the Eritrean diaspora partly represents the characteristics of Eritrean migration today. First of all, Eritreans abroad are deeply divided along political, generational and regional lines. The political disagreement between older generations, usually supporters of the previous guerrilla fighters and now country rulers – the Eritrean People's Liberation Front – and new generations escaping from it have been widely portrayed

'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1.1 (1991), 83–99.

36 Victoria Bernal, *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

37 Atsuko Karin Matsuoka and John Sorenson, J., *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); John Sorenson, 'Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29.2 (1991), 301–317.

38 Anna Arnone, 'The Eritrean Festival in the Time-Warp', *Social Evolution & History*, 13.2 (2014) <<https://www.socionauki.ru/journal/articles/250520/>> (accessed 29 September 2017); Nicole Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad, 'By Way of Patriotism, Coercion, or Instrumentalization: How the Eritrean Regime Makes Use of the Diaspora to Stabilize its Rule', *Globalizations* (2017), 1–16.

39 Anna Arnone, 'Tourism and the Eritrean Diaspora', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29.4 (2011), 441–454.

by scholars of Eritrea.⁴⁰ Although the boundaries between supporters and opponents, between old generations and new ones are often less clear-cut than assumed,⁴¹ this deep divide is reflected in limited solidarity among long stayers and newcomers in the cities where I conducted research in Italy. However, political and generational divides are by no means the only determinants of limited solidarity among Eritreans.⁴² Mistrust related to regional belonging and religious membership also contributes to hinder reciprocal support. As I argued elsewhere,⁴³ within a context of limited institutional support for asylum seekers and in presence of a well-rooted imagination about the most favourable destinations, mistrust between long stayers and newcomers is among the reasons why Italy does not represent a desired destination for Eritreans.

Due to the disillusioned and unfavourable political and social atmosphere back home, the old days' aspiration to return to Eritrea in a near future has partly vanished.⁴⁴ Although contemporary refugees certainly retain a strong sense of national and cultural identity as people in exile, they seem less convinced about returning home once the political conditions will allow it. Most of the Eritreans I have encountered had lost hope for any significant change in their country and wanted to settle down in Europe or other Western countries, where they thought they had better chances of building a future for them and their children.

All the families I encountered in Eritrea told me that the thirty-year long war of independence had brought a lot of suffering and little benefit to them. Most families had lost some members in the war, and younger

40 Tricia Redeker Hepner, 'Generation Nationalism and Generation Asylum: Eritrean Migrants, the Global Diaspora, and the Transnational Nation-State', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 18.1 (2015), 184–207.

41 Jennifer Riggan, *The Struggling State: Nationalism, Mass Militarization and the Reeducation of Eritrea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016).

42 Milena Belloni, 'Learning How to Squat: Cooperation and Conflict between Refugees and Natives in Rome', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29.4 (2016), 506–527.

43 Milena Belloni, 'Refugees as Gamblers', 104–119.

44 See also Nadjé Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser, 'The Limits to "Transnationalism": Bosnian and Eritrean Refugees in Europe as Emerging Transnational Communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24. 4 (2001), 578–600.

generations still today denounce the limitation of their freedom due the pervasive effect of government policies to defend and develop the country.⁴⁵ Indeed, they felt that the only possibility for a better future would lie in migration. Likewise, those Eritreans whom I met in Rome, Milan and Genoa were thinking about what destination to reach so that their children could live there and enjoy not only political but also social rights. These were deemed extremely important among my interlocutors in order to protect their families from economic insecurity affecting unskilled and increasingly precarious labour force in Italy and Europe too. This is another reason why Italy is usually not perceived as a suitable destination, in spite of alleged cultural similarities.

Italian linguistic and cultural influences are limited among Eritreans. As education for indigenous people had never been a priority in the mind of colonial administrators and had been instead limited to fourth grade, Italian language was never widespread among Eritreans,⁴⁶ unlike French and English in West and South Africa. Even today young Eritreans usually cannot speak Italian, unless they have attended primary and secondary Italian schools in Asmara. In the past, a certain familiarity with Italian popular culture – being it music, cinema or architectural fashion – has been reported among scholars of Eritrean migration.⁴⁷ However, today Italian cultural influence seems to have gone irremediably lost. Many Eritreans I met still bear memories of their grandfathers serving as *ascari* in the Italian army or of some Italian proverb that their older relatives used to repeat to them. However, my young interlocutors' cultural taste seems far more influenced by the imagery of Hollywood movies and TV series, like many youth across the world.⁴⁸

45 See also Hirt and Abdulkader, "Dreams Don't Come True in Eritrea".

46 Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882–1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact* (Stockholm: Uppsala University, 1987).

47 See Marchetti, *Black Girls*, 82–88.

48 About youth culture and black diaspora see Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, eds, *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

A Reciprocal Amnesia

A so-called historical amnesia of colonial past is often mentioned in the studies on the legacy and memory of colonialism in Italy. However, the amnesia about Italian colonialism is also present in Eritrea,⁴⁹ and it is relevant when discussing why migrants choose a destination instead of another. Limited ongoing cultural and social connections between Italy and Eritrea correspond to a widespread sanitized memory of colonialism. This is often not the case for other postcolonial migrants. Some authors have highlighted how the traumas and the conflicts produced by colonization and its aftermath can be among the reasons why migrants do not want to go to the metropole. For instance, the Algerians interviewed by Michael Collyer (2005) in the United Kingdom stated that ongoing collaboration between Algerian secret services and the French government made France an unsuitable destination for political refugees. The legacy of the violent decolonization process was then playing an important role in the choice of Algerians' final destination. However, this does not seem to be the case for Eritreans.

Although open and implicit violence towards the indigenous population was part of the everyday life during Italian colonial times,⁵⁰ the memory of it seems to have no major role in shaping my interlocutors' perceptions about Italy and Italians. Young and older people I met in Eritrea as well as abroad mostly used to paint a rather positive picture of Italian times and to highlight cultural similarities between Italians and Eritreans. My interlocutors used to point out the significant amount of Italian words which are daily used by Tigrinya speakers, such as 'forchetta, macchina, comodori [*sic*], salata' [fork,

49 Irma Taddia, 'Italian Memories / African Memories of Colonialism', in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds, *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 209–219; Alessandro Triulzi, 'Displacing the Colonial Event: Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy', *Interventions*, 8.3 (2006), 430–443.

50 See Angelo Del Boca, 'The Myths, Suppressions, Denials, and Defaults of Italian Colonialism', in Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (2003), 17–36.

car, tomatoes, salad]. Some of them also said: 'We eat pasta like Italians! It is because Italians have been here for fifty years. Now our cultures are similar'. Sometimes they would go as far as to say that Eritreans had learned a lot from Italians and that this knowledge made them different – implicitly they meant 'better' – than their Ethiopian Tigreyan counterparts, with whom they did share culture, history, religion, ethnic ties and language.⁵¹ Past colonial influences, in other words, were revisited as tools of boundary-making vis-à-vis other neighbour populations. Although these statements may have been influenced by their fear to offend me or to the desire to please me as Italian,⁵² they also reproduce a rather sanitized memory of colonial times.

The Eritrean national rhetoric in the last twenty-eight years in fact has rather focused on the wrongs suffered by Eritrea from the hands of the British administration that dismantled the industrial apparatus of the country and to the violence of Ethiopian occupiers since 1961.⁵³ Nowadays the struggle for daily survival, while dodging military service and finding a way out of high inflation and a stagnating economy, probably contributes to a nostalgic feeling of the past.

Even when I interviewed Eritrean refugees aiming to transit through Italy, they tended to state that Italy was a good country to settle down if not for the weak economy and little possibilities to have a stable employment. My

- 51 These postcolonial traits of Eritrean identity and their implications in the border conflict with Ethiopia have been analysed among the others by F. Guazzini, 'Border Stories: Identity Perceptions of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Colonial Boundary, 1897–1908', *Quaderni storici*, 37.1 (2002), 221–258 and Jon Abbink, 'Creating Borders: Exploring the Impact of the Ethio-Eritrean War on the Local Population', *Africa* (2001), 447–458.
- 52 Regarding informants' expectations in ethnographic research see, Mary John, 'Postcolonial Feminists in the Western Intellectual Field: Anthropologists and Native Informants?', *Inscriptions*, 5 (1989), 49–73; Paolo Boccagni, 'From Rapport to Collaboration... and Beyond? Revisiting Field Relationships in an Ethnography of Ecuadorian Migrants', *Qualitative Research*, 11.6 (2011), 736–754.
- 53 On the construction of Eritrean national rhetoric see Sara Rich Dorman, 'Narratives of Nationalism in Eritrea: Research and Revisionism', *Nations and Nationalism*, 11.2 (2005), 203–222; Richard Reid, 'Caught in the Headlights of History: Eritrea, the EPLF and the Post-War Nation-State', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 43.3 (2005), 467–488.

interviewees did not mention racism and xenophobic attitudes, which Jacqueline Andall saw as main reasons for which second generation black immigrants do not feel at home in Italy.⁵⁴ This is probably due to my interlocutors' limited time in Italy, little interaction with locals and fewer expectations of being accepted as equals. 'Italian people are sociable ... when you stand at the bus stop they talk to you. In Norway, it is not the same', as one refugee in Italy told me, by comparing his experience with the one of his brother who was living in Norway. These remarks were common among my research participants in Italy and among their relatives in Eritrea. A nun in her early fifties, whom I encountered in Eritrea, had been to Canada to visit her sister. She found that Canada was a good country, but people were too shy and never talked to each other. She rather felt at home when she went to Italy: 'Italians would talk profusely when one asks them for an information. In Genova, there are palm trees like in Massawa!' Although Italy was not seen as a suitable destination, the above statements do not highlight the role of traumas and conflicts produced by colonization and its aftermath in the Eritreans' choice of moving onwards.

Colonial experience, therefore, has little influence on the desire to stay or the aspiration to leave from Italy. Eritrean transit migration – like other contemporary secondary migration flows – is embedded in the context of welfare inequalities characterizing refugee reception system in Europe.⁵⁵ These secondary movements tend to be resilient to policy obstacles, such as the Dublin Regulation. Well-established imaginaries, expectations and aspirations shaped and reproduced through transnational communication and practices keep pushing Eritreans northwards, in spite of the limited possibilities to find a job and the risk of being returned to the first European country of asylum.⁵⁶

- 54 Jacqueline Andall, 'Second-Generation Attitude? African-Italians in Milan', 402.
- 55 Liza Schuster, 'The Continuing Mobility of Migrants in Italy: Shifting between Places and Statuses', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31.4 (2005), 757–774; Jan-Paul Brekke and Grete Brochmann, 'Stuck in Transit: Secondary Migration of Asylum Seekers in Europe, National Differences, and the Dublin Regulation', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28.2 (2015), 145–162.
- 56 Milena Belloni, 'Refugees as Gamblers: Eritreans Seeking to Migrate through Italy', *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 14.1 (2016), 104–119.

The lack of privileged connections between Eritreans and Italy reflected in my research participants' aspirations to move onwards from Italy, as well as the little trace of the colonial past in their memories, suggest the existence of a twofold amnesia. Italian public discourse and consciousness is still far from facing the colonial past and its legacies, but subjects coming from former Italian colonies partly reproduce this selective memory through their own sanitized narratives. When claiming their rights to cross borders and contesting the system that forces them into involuntary immobility,⁵⁷ many of my interlocutors did recall the colonial past, as the following ethnographic vignette illustrates.

Postcolonial Claims: Migrants' Perspectives of Fairness and Responsibilities

During my stay in Addis Ababa, I was invited by some of my research participants to meet with a group of Eritrean refugees. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the change of visa policy in the Italian Embassy of the Ethiopian capital city. That was one of the main concerns for Eritreans in Ethiopia in 2013, as a recent change in the Italian Embassy diplomatic office had made family reunification processes with partners in Europe significantly more difficult. My research participants had apparently thought I could help them and intercede with the Italian Embassy about their visa cases. Hagos, a thirty-year-old refugee, was the main spokesperson of a group of people from Mai Nefas village in Eritrea. He had prepared a speech where he explained the four main issues that were important to him and his fellows. Firstly, they had been forced to escape from their

⁵⁷ About the concept of involuntary immobility see Stephen C. Lubkemann, 'Involuntary Immobility: on a Theoretical Invisibility in Forced Migration Studies', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21.4 (2008), 454–475; Jorgen Carling, 'Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28.1 (2002), 5–42.

country because of the 'lack of freedom', such as freedom of expression. Secondly, they were facing many difficulties in Ethiopia related to their little prospect to work. Thirdly, they expressed an extremely clear vision of those who are responsible for their suffering and more specifically of the 2013 Lampedusa migrant shipwreck in which some months before over 360 Eritreans die. Many of the victims were their friends and spent some time in Ethiopia too. Hagos said:

I personally think that the first responsible for the tragedy of Lampedusa is the government of Eritrea; secondly, I think the responsible is the Embassy of Italy in Ethiopia, because many people had a process with Italy but their visas had been rejected by the Embassy. [Lastly,] because of colonization, I think that Italy has the obligation to receive and welcome Eritreans.⁵⁸

I was asked to comment on the second point, and I replied that I could not judge other people's work and that the Embassy had its own ways to check the plausibility of marriages. I addressed their doubts about visa proceedings and rights of asylum seekers, but most of them left the room unsatisfied as my answers could not bring a solution to their problems.

My encounter with Hagos and his co-nationals can be seen as an exemplary instance of the postcolonial encounter, as sons and daughters of former colonial subjects interrogated the Western researcher. My interlocutors and myself were dislocated outside our respective countries, but also separated by a wide variety of conditions mostly surrounding citizenship and class, which allowed me to enjoy freedom of movement and instead hindered my interlocutors' migration aspirations. Hagos' criticisms were addressed against the global system of inequalities, borders, visa regulations whose consequences are mostly suffered by those citizens coming from previously colonized countries. In particular, my interlocutors' condition exemplifies the one of millions of refugees trapped – often in camps – without prospects for long-term local integration or repatriation. Refugees, mostly defined as those who emigrate, were instead lamenting their condition of forced immobility. Indeed, lack of mobility even more

⁵⁸ Fieldnotes, Addis Ababa, October 2013.

than forced mobility defines – as Jorgen Carling and Stephen Lubkemann argue – current geopolitical scenarios and its inequalities.⁵⁹

Hagos was not only arguing against the symbols of international asylum regime and Western nations, he was also taking part in organized protests. A month before I started my fieldwork in Ethiopia (October 2013), a large protest had taken place in the camps of northern Ethiopia. During a mourning ceremony for the victims of Lampedusa migrant shipwreck, refugees voiced their anger towards a system that did not provide any prospect to them, except risking their lives at sea. Their main claim was that the Lampedusa tragedy had been the consequence of insufficient resettlement quotas from the camps. Peaceful demonstrations were held, but smaller groups of young refugees also threw stones at local bureaux. Significantly, the most violent acts targeted the symbols of the current asylum regime, such as UNHCR offices and services. Instrumental to the specific aim of obtaining resettlement quotas, the above remonstrations also express Eritreans' political and moral views on fairness, rights to mobility and legitimate means to achieve it. Their insubordination could be seen as a 'counter-memory' – as framed by Stephen Legg⁶⁰ – or an expression of the 'subaltern consciousness', as discussed in the works of Guha Ranajit.⁶¹ Indeed, their views on history and borders showed a clear critique of a system which bears the marks of inequalities rooted in colonialism. Migrants' attempts to cross borders at all cost were justified by their lack of viable options, therefore authorities were to be blamed for deaths at sea and for their meaningless visa policies.

However, Hagos' claims were only partly 'revolutionary'. While protesting the injustice of international asylum system, Hagos was inadvertently endorsing the older Italian colonial discourse, which pictured Eritrea as an Italian territory, in order to turn it against current restrictive visa policies. It was not the first time I had heard similar claims. During my

59 Jacqueline Andall, 'Second-Generation Attitude?', 402.

60 Stephan Legg, 'Sites of Counter-Memory: The Refusal to Forget and the Nationalist Struggle in Colonial Delhi', *Historical Geography*, 33 (2005), 180–201.

61 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

experience in the asylum seekers' reception centre of Follonica in Tuscany, Eritreans waiting for their interviews with the asylum commission often complained about the injustice of their condition, and one of their most common arguments was: 'Italians have been in Eritrea for over fifty years, why should we ask permission to come here now?' Another argument was that Italy, as former colonizing country, should have played a more active role in protecting Eritreans from their own rulers and help those who had escaped from them. Postcolonial and neocolonial aspects were both ambivalently present in my interlocutors' claims.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of some of the narratives collected among my Eritrean interviewees on their way to and through Italy, this chapter has investigated the link between contemporary Eritrean migration and colonialism. While mapping older and newer migrations, I examined the extent to which colonialism has contributed to produce an Eritrean diaspora, and the extent to which the characteristics of these migrants' mobility patterns reflect an old common history. In a strict sense, Eritrean migrations are hardly definable as postcolonial. The drivers, trajectories and destinations of their mobility to Italy do not overlap with those of subjects from former colonies towards the colonial metropole. The limited role of Italy in contemporary migrants' imaginaries stems from several factors mostly unrelated to colonialism, such as perceived labour market opportunities and asylum reception standards, not to mention internal divides within the Eritrean diaspora. The lack of a specific connection between Italian society and Eritrean migrants seems to confirm the existence of a collective selective memory as the greater legacy of Italian colonialism. While being faced with a significant flow of migrants from its former colonies, Italian society feels little or no need to publicly reflect on its colonial past and neocolonial present. Simultaneously, subjects from former colonies reproduce rather purged memories of colonial times in their own country.

However, the claims and visions expressed by those who take enormous risks to cross the borders of Europe do bear a postcolonial aspect. While contesting the fairness of borders as well as visa policies, my interlocutors implicitly pointed to social inequalities and hierarchies of citizenship reproduced since colonialism. Their claims are also postcolonial because they directly refer to the past role of Italy in Eritrea. Based on Italy's long-term political and historic responsibilities towards its first colony, they instrumentally claim the right to have a special status among those who arrive to Italy. This narrative illustrates how colonial memories are reinterpreted and actively used by contemporary migrants and refugees in their everyday struggle across borders.

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SIMONE BRIONI

10 Sport: Leisure, Representation, and Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion

Sport played an important role in the colonization of Africa. Colonizers 'viewed sport as an integral part of the "civilizing mission" – a tool for non coercive political domination and social control of local subjects', and they 'articulated an exclusionary social identity through sport, thereby unifying white communities and strengthening their cultural bonds with the imperial metropole'.¹ A close look at the use of sports in the Italian colonies shows a history of privilege, oppression, 'subordination and separation from the activities of white people'.² This is not only evident in the actual practice of sport, but also in the disposition of colonized audiences attending sport events, who were relegated to specific sections of stadiums.³ Sport was seen as a form of social control to impart a particular ideology and to foster a sense of discipline and hard work: 'the sporting field was [...] the space in which [the acquisition of Western] virtues were honed, tested, maintained and subject to surveillance'.⁴ In the 1930s, sport gave Italians the possibility to keep their colonial subjects busy with 'an activity that was strongly characterized as "Western"

- 1 Peter Alegi, 'Sports', in Melvin E. Page, ed., *Colonialism: An International Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2003), 558.
- 2 Gianluca Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', in Maria Cannata and Sergio Giuntini, eds, *Sport e Fascismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009), 249.
- 3 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 248–252.
- 4 Tony Schirato, *Understanding Sports Culture* (Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2007), 64.

[by complying to] a primary necessity of a colonial government that did not rely purely on repression'.⁵ Tony Schirato also notes that 'sport had a masculinist inflection, which suited the gender politics of nineteenth-century [European] colonialism', and the process of colonial gendering of sport continued into the twentieth century.⁶ Lando Ferretti – the president of the Italian Olympic Committee from 1925 to 1928, and a key figure of Italy's sporting culture during fascism – believed that sport was crucial to make Italian people across different economic and social classes feel part of the same nation. Moreover, he thought that investment in spectacular sporting performances was pivotal to the showcasing of the imperial aspirations of the country.⁷

Cycling is an example of the legacy of Italian sports in Eritrea. Italians organized the first race in Asmara in 1937, and colonial newspapers such as *Asmara Sport* and *La Pagina Sportiva* testify to the interest in this sport.⁸ The enforcement of laws that denied Italian citizenship to *meticci* in 1936, laws against interracial unions enacted in 1937, and the racial laws of 1938 not only meant that *meticci* champions in Italy like boxer Leone Jacovacci were forced to abandon their professional activities,⁹ but also that only Italians could take part in cycling races in the Italian colonies. As Fikresus Fikrejesus Amahazion has argued, a cycling race took place in Asmara in 1939, and it did actually include Eritreans in order to demonstrate the supposed superiority of white Italians.¹⁰ However, Ghebremariam Ghebru's victory in this race proved the fascists wrong. Yet cycling continued to be white-dominated, and on 13 May 1946, Italians inaugurated the first Eritrean cycling race, which became an important

5 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 254.

6 Schirato, *Understanding Sports Culture*, 69.

7 Andrea Bacci, *Lo sport nella propaganda fascista* (Turin: Bradipolibri, 2002), 129–149.

8 Alessandro Leogrande, *La frontiera* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2015), 172.

9 Mauro Valeri, *Nero di Roma: storia di Leone Jacovacci, l'invincibile mulatto italiano* (Rome: Palombi Editori, 2009).

10 Fikresus Fikrejesus Amahazion, 'Pedaling History: Eritrea's Teklehaimanot and Kudus in France', *tesfanews.net* <<https://www.tesfanews.net/eritrea-pedaling-history-at-tour-de-france/>> (accessed 6 August 2017).

event for socialization among Italian settlers.¹¹ Cycling continues to be one of the most popular national sports in Eritrea today. Indeed, it is not a surprise that the first black Africans to compete in the Tour de France, Merhawi Kudus and Daniel Teklehaimanot – the first African to wear the polka dot (King of the Mountains) jersey for three stages of the 2015 Tour – are Eritreans.

The story of Ghebremariam Ghebru is not an isolated case. Fascists promoted sport in the colonies, but they also feared that this activity could disrupt racial divisions and help colonized subjects to join forces.¹² Mohamed Creui Hamed won the 1928 marathon in Tripoli, while the highest-placing Italian arrived fourth. As a consequence, Italians excluded Arab and Jewish people from participating in the 1930 competition.¹³ Igiaba Scego saw the triumph of Ethiopian marathon runner Abebe Bikila at the Rome 1960 Olympic Games as a symbolic response to the former colonizers of his country.¹⁴ These stories show that Africans resisted, adapted, and adopted European sports, by refusing to be passive victims of Western cultural imperialism. As Gerald Gems argues: 'Sporting forms and practices offered myriad of responses in the negotiation of culture, ranging from acculturation to political and surrogate warfare. The only certainty was that both dominant and subordinate groups would be changed in the process'.¹⁵ In other words, sport can be seen as 'an arena through which various groups actively rework their relationships and respond to changing social conditions as a whole'.¹⁶ However, it would be a mistake to look at sport

11 Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale: Nostalgia delle colonie*, vol. 4 (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), 121.

12 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 257.

13 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 240–241.

14 Igiaba Scego, 'La Maratona della Rivincita, Abebe Bikila, Roma, 1960', in Viviana Gravano and Giulia Grechi, eds, *Presente imperfetto. Eredità coloniali e immaginari razziali contemporanei* (Milan: Mimesis, 2015), 99–107.

15 Gerald Gems, 'Sport, Colonialism, and United States Imperialism', *Journal of Sport History*, 33.1 (2006), 6.

16 Grant Jarvie, 'Introduction: Sport, Racism and Ethnicity', in Grant Jarvie, ed., *Sport Racism and Ethnicity* (London; New York; Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 2005), 1.

in the colonies exclusively as a dialectic relationship between colonizers and colonized: as Gabrielli maintains, Italians had difficulties in creating teams where 'chiefs and young people belonging to lower classes' could play together.¹⁷

This chapter focuses on two aspects of postcolonial sport cultures regarding Italy and its former colonies: the politics of inclusion and exclusion in football and the politics of representation of Olympic athletes. Taking inspiration from those studies that have seen football in Italy – both in the fascist¹⁸ and post-fascist period¹⁹ – as a privileged field for identity struggles and politics, the chapter first explores the link between nationalism and exclusion, which is often stained by the memory of racial discrimination. I will also explore how transnational migrations have changed the idea of national identity in sport. The second section focuses on the ways in which Saamiya Yusuf Omar – a Somali athlete who participated in the Beijing Olympics of 2006 and lost her life in the Mediterranean sea in 2012 while she was trying to reach Lampedusa by boat – has been represented in Giuseppe Catuzzella's *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*²⁰ and Reinhard Kleist's graphic novel *An Olympic Dream: The Story of Samia Yusuf Omar*.²¹ This chapter not only compares the point of view through which the same story is narrated, but also shows that the 'true' description of sport events might reiterate 'imagined' portrayals of Muslim subjects coming from former Italian colonies.

- 17 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 254.
- 18 Antonio Papa and Guido Panico, *Storia sociale del calcio in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); and Giuseppe Di Candido, *Calciatori in camicia nera: lo sport più amato dagli italiani durante il ventennio fascista* (Rome: Edizioni Associate, 2006).
- 19 Fabien Archambault, *Le contrôle du ballon: les catholiques, les communistes et le football en Italie de 1943 au tournant des années 1980* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2012).
- 20 Giuseppe Catuzzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, trans. by Anne Milano Appel (London: Penguin, 2016). This novel was originally published in Italian: Giuseppe Catuzzella, *Non dirmi che hai paura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2014).
- 21 Reinhard Kleist, *An Olympic Dream: The Story of Samia Yusuf Omar*, trans. by Ivanka Hahnenberger (London: Self Made Hero, 2016). This graphic novel was originally published in German: Reinhard Kleist, *Der Traum von Olympia. Die Geschichte von Samia Yusuf Omar* (Hamburg: Karlsen, 2015). I will refer to Saamiya as Samia, using the form employed in Catuzzella's and Kleist's novels.

Football and the Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion

According to Mauro Valeri: 'Football was born racist. It was born as a sport that was reserved to some and prohibited to others. Where the "some" and the "others" are distinct and set against each other, in relation to precise categories set by the coeval biological racism'.²² Football was initially played in Britain only by elites, who had time to spare for leisure.²³ The first Italian team, Genoa Cricket and Football Club, was set up by British consular officials in 1893, and 'no Italians could be members' of this team.²⁴ In 1899, 'a quota system was introduced to protect the English. Italians would not be allowed to make up more than half of the total membership of the club'.²⁵ By 1908 the system changed and non-Italian players were excluded from the national football league, but they were readmitted the following year 'after the farcical failure of the Italian-only championship'.²⁶ In 1926, 'the regime institutionalized calcio as a Fascist game',²⁷ and it allowed each Italian team to hire just two foreign players, one of which could play in a match. In 1926, no foreigners could play as professional players in Italy.²⁸ However, the quality of the Italian football league was so negatively affected that the fascist authorities encouraged teams to naturalize foreign players of Italian descent, thanks to a 1912 law on citizenship based on *ius sanguinis* law that today still determines citizenship by the parents who are citizen of a state instead of the place of birth.

- 22 Mauro Valeri, *Che razza di tifo. Dieci anni di razzismo nel calcio italiano* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 9.
- 23 Christian Koller and Fabian Braendle, *Goal!: A Cultural and Social History of Modern Football*, trans. by David S. Bachrach (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 8–43.
- 24 John Foot, *Calcio: A History of Italian Football* [ebook] (London: Harper, 2010), 36.
- 25 Foot, *Calcio*, 37.
- 26 Foot, *Calcio*, 60.
- 27 Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 2.
- 28 Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 9.

Football was a privileged site for colonial rule and Italian acculturation in the Horn of Africa. This aspect is stressed in Garane Garane's novel *Il latte è buono* [Milk is Good], when Gashan – the main character – notes that Somalis play 'balooni', football.²⁹ Nonetheless, the 1926 reform of Italian football also known as 'Carta di Viareggio' [Viareggio regulation] particularly penalized 'black people in the colonies, who could play, but in separate leagues'.³⁰ However, laws were not always strictly applied. While in 1924 there was just one Arab player in the Italian league in Libya, in 1929 the same league had five Arab players.³¹ Pietro Badoglio – the governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica from 1929 to 1933 – unsuccessfully tried to create a tournament for Italian colonial subjects.³² His successor, Italo Balbo, instead allowed indigenous peoples to play in 1935.³³ Moreover, he did not strictly apply the racial law and by 1938 two Arab teams could be found in the Italian football league in Libya.³⁴ However, in the 1938–1939 tournament all Libyan and Jewish players were excluded.³⁵

The first Italian regional football league in Eritrea was created in 1936 and only Italians could participate. The competition allowed Eritrean players only after 1947, and in 1953 – one year after Eritrea became a federal territory of Ethiopia – the Eritrean national league merged into its Ethiopian counterpart. During the Ethiopian occupation football had a key identitarian role and was a source of pride for Eritrean independentists, given both the strength of the teams based in Eritrea and the sporting ability of players who were born there. Italian settlers had a fundamental role in the professional growth of

29 Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone, 2005), 103.

30 Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 10.

31 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 240.

32 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 241.

33 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 242.

34 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 243.

35 Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 243.

this sport in Eritrea after the Second World War. One of the most popular football figures was Massimo Fenili, a *meticcio* player who played for Gruppo Sportivo Asmara from 1954 to 1967 and became the coach of this team from 1969 to 1975, winning two Eritrean and three Ethiopian national championships. Fenili was one of the first Italian coaches who trained an African team, but it should be noted that other Italian trainers such as Luigi Manfredi and Francesco (Franco) Scoglio had professional experiences in Africa.³⁶ Another strong *meticcio* player was Luciano Vassallo. Like Fenili, Vassallo was born in 1935, one year before the fascist laws against *meticcio*. Although he was the most representative player of his team at the 1962 World Cup in Mexico, Ethiopian authorities tried to deprive him of his role of captain because he was a foreigner and even suggested Africanizing his name.³⁷

Vassallo is mentioned in the acknowledgements of Enrico Brizzi's alternative history novel *L'inattesa piega degli eventi* [The Unexpected Turn of Events],³⁸ which is set in the Horn of Africa and imagines what would have happened if Italy had won the Second World War. The main character is a sport journalist who has to report on football league in the Italian colonies, 'Serie Africa'. As I have argued elsewhere, *L'inattesa piega degli eventi* shows the important role of football during fascism in the construction of Italian national identity, the control of the colonial population, and the support of the imperial propaganda. Moreover, this novel suggests a comparison between its uchronic history and the legacy in today's Italy of the institutionalized racial discrimination that was present in the colonies.³⁹ For instance, *L'inattesa piega degli eventi* refers to crowds making monkey noises at a black player,⁴⁰ which remind us of those that greeted Italian player Mario Balotelli as he entered many Italian stadiums. Racism

36 Dario Falcini, 'Gli allenatori italiani in Africa', *rivistaundici.com*, <<http://www.rivistaundici.com/2017/01/24/allenatori-africa/>> (accessed 5 August 2017).

37 Antonio Felici, *Stella d'Africa: La vita straordinaria di Sebastiano Vassallo, mito del calcio africano anni '60, esiliato in Italia* (Rome: Coralli, 2015).

38 Enrico Brizzi, *L'inattesa piega degli eventi* (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2008).

39 Simone Brioni, 'Fantahistorical vs. Fantafascist Epic: "Contemporary" Alternative Italian Colonial Histories', *Science Fiction Studies*, 42 (2015), 305–321.

40 Brizzi, *L'inattesa piega degli eventi*, 192.

in football cannot exclusively be seen as the legacy of the Italian colonial past, but Roberto Pedretti is right to argue that Balotelli's case cannot be understood 'without investigating the bundle of historical and social tensions that are linked to the specificity of the Italian and European colonial past and to the present history of migrations'.⁴¹

Balotelli is not the first player of African origins to play in the Italian football league: Edwing Ronald Firmani played for U.C. Sampdoria in 1955. Balotelli is not the first black Italian player, as Fabio Liverani – the son of an Italian father and a Somali mother – played in the national team in 2001–2002. After Liverani's debut, sport newspapers accused the Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni of having 'coloured' the national team. Moreover, the A.S. Roma supporters referred to him with the n-word and sang 'We are the champions of Italy. You are Liverani, Somalia' against this player who was a member of the rival team S.S. Lazio from 2000 to 2006.⁴² Balotelli was not even the first Serie A player to be born in Italy but to receive Italian citizenship when he was eighteen years old because of the foreign origins of his parents: Stefano Okaka and Angelo Ogbonna made their debut in the top Italian football league before him in 2005 and 2007, respectively. Balotelli was the fourth black Italian to enter the under-21 Italian team in 2008 after Joseph Dayo Oshadogan (1996), Matteo Ferrari (1999), and Fabiano Santacroce (2007). Moreover, Balotelli could not join the under-15 and the under-17 teams as he was considered a Ghanaian immigrant. Balotelli is the youngest professional player in the history of Italian football as he played when he was fifteen years old in the Italian football third league division with A.C. Lumezzane in 2006.

Youth and African-ness are two important traits of Balotelli's representation, as he was frequently portrayed as an immature subject who needed to be educated, echoing a very common colonial stereotype.⁴³ According to Pedretti the mainstream portrayal of Balotelli shows:

- 41 Roberto Pedretti, 'Il colore del denaro, il colore della pelle. Marketing, razzismo e capitale nel calcio: le ambiguità del caso Balotelli', *Altre Modernità*, 14 (2015), 42.
 42 Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 45.
 43 Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 15.

a reproduction adapted to the world of sport of the stereotype of the good savage, [who was appreciated] because of his athletic and physical qualities, although the lack of tactical discipline and the lack of leadership – which both signaled a kind of 'natural' inferiority – were underlined.⁴⁴

In 2013, Paolo Berlusconi – the brother of the president of A.C. Milan and former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi – said that Balotelli – who played for A.C. Milan in 2013–2014 and 2015–2016 – was 'the little [n-word] of their family'.⁴⁵ This expression mixed paternalism with what Valeri calls – by referring to the indigenous soldiers who fought in the Italian colonial army, *ascari* – 'ascarofilia', namely the attitude to accept 'or even celebrate "our blacks", by continuing to insult the "black people of others"'.⁴⁶ Balotelli's African-ness was targeted on several occasions within and outside the football pitch, but perhaps the most noticeable was on 29 July 2008, when Juventus F.C. supporters sang 'there are no black Italians'. It is interesting to note that these chants were also addressed to the black basketball player of UK and Italian citizenship Charlton Myers, who was standard bearer at the Sydney Olympics in 2000,⁴⁷ but these episodes of racism did not receive the same resonance as in the case of Balotelli. These racist chants referred explicitly to 'the idea of Italianness constructed during Fascism [...] that represents Italians as Mediterranean but not black'.⁴⁸ In this regard, it is interesting to note that Serie A saw the use of fascist symbolism by supporters and players like Paolo Di Canio in the 2004–2005⁴⁹ and 2005–2006 Italian Premier League.⁵⁰ According to

- 44 Pedretti, 'Il colore del denaro, il colore della pelle', 32.
 45 Gianluca Melillo, 'Balotelli, il "negretto di famiglia"', *linkiesta.it* <<http://www.linkiesta.it/it/blog-post/2013/02/05/balotelli-il-negretto-di-famiglia/14348/>> (accessed 5 August 2017).
 46 Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 28.
 47 Roberto Rizzo, 'Howe: "Mai insultato" Myers: "Sì, in campo a Varese"', *corriere.it* <http://www.corriere.it/cronache/08_settembre_15/rizzo_howe_myers_balotelli_8b8b9d26-82eb-11dd-a6c8-00144f02aabc.shtml> (accessed 5 August 2017).
 48 Gaia Giuliani, "Non ci sono italiani negri". Il colore legittimo nell'Italia contemporanea', *Studi Culturali* 2 (2013), 264–265.
 49 Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 81–84.
 50 Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 102–108.

Pedretti, Balotelli's celebration after the goal he scored against Germany on 28 June 2012 in the semi-finals for the European Cup can be seen as a response to the racist chants against him:

it is an iconic image that shows strength, beauty, pride, but also loneliness. It seems that with his body language Balotelli wants to say: Here I am, I am black and Italian, my body is a place where the contradictions of a country that cannot face the process of transformation of its national identity.⁵¹

Balotelli's case represents race blindness at its best. Sportsmen and supporters felt justified in expressing explicitly racist comments against him because he is rich, arrogant and spoiled.⁵² The discrimination against this player shows that the 'legge Mancino' concerning racism – the Law 25 June 1993, no. 205 – is rarely applied and 'stadiums [are] places where racism is tolerated (with the naive certainty to contain it)'.⁵³

Balotelli's story also shows that the history of contemporary football culture is linked to transnational global migrations. Most players of the Eritrean national team like Sammy Habte, Sirad Hagos, and Asrafil Tsai, just to mention a few, live abroad, and play in the leagues of Luxemburg, Germany, and Uganda. Henok Goitom was born in Sweden, but he could play for the Eritrean national team because of his descent. He also played in Italy, for Udinese Calcio. It should be noted that in 2012 the Eritrean national football team – twenty-two people including the medical staff – went to Uganda to participate to the Cecafta Cup, but seventeen players

⁵¹ Pedretti, 'Il colore del denaro, il colore della pelle', 42.

⁵² Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 162.

⁵³ Valeri, *Che razza di tifo*, 12. On the issue of migration and discrimination in Italian football see also Daniele Comberiati, 'Prendere a calci l'Italia. Il calcio degli anni Ottanta, l'emigrazione e la questione nazionale', in Daniele Comberiati and Luciano Curreri, *Verso il fuorigioco. Una squadra di storie sul calcio* (Piombino: Il foglio, 2014), 37–54; and Roberto Derobertis, 'Ritratto dell'artista da tifoso meridionale. L'allenatore (1963) di Salvatore Bruno, il calcio e le nevrosi del Miracolo economico', in Daniele Comberiati and Luciano Curreri, *Verso il fuorigioco. Una squadra di storie sul calcio* (Piombino: Il foglio, 2014), 9–32.

and one doctor did not go back to Asmara and asked for political asylum.⁵⁴ In 2015, ten Eritrean football players sought asylum in Botswana.⁵⁵ In 1997, A.C. Perugia gave asylum to – but the news was given as if the team 'adopted' – ten players of the Ethiopian national team.⁵⁶ These events show that being an athlete offers more opportunities for people from the Horn of Africa to reach Europe than those that are available for those who cross the Mediterranean Sea by boat. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that F.C. Lampedusa Hamburg, a football club of West African refugees in Hamburg, took its name from the place in Europe where they first arrived before moving to Germany.

Football reproduces social and political tensions: it is a social practice which reflects the changing features and modes of representation of the society in which it is played.⁵⁷ As sports are 'far too complex and diverse to be viewed as simple products of voluntary behaviour',⁵⁸ it is necessary to carefully analyse the representation of black players in a broader historical and geographical context, reflecting upon 'what subterranean paths and re-elaboration of the past have kept alive these prejudices, so that they are reproduced today in a manner so outrageously similar to the past'.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Andrew Jackson Oryada, 'Eritrean players seek asylum in Uganda', *bbc.com* <<http://www.bbc.com/sport/football/20610675>> (accessed 5 August 2017).

⁵⁵ 'Eritrean Football Players Seek Asylum in Botswana', *bbc.com* <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34534975>> (accessed 5 August 2017). On the diaspora of Eritrean football players, see Okeowo, Alexis, 'The Soccer-Star Refugees of Eritrea', *newyorker.com* <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/12/the-soccer-star-refugees-of-eritrea>> (accessed 5 August 2017).

⁵⁶ "Asilo sportivo": Gaucchi adotta i nazionali etiopi', *adnkronos.com* <http://www1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/1997/02/08/Sport/ASILO-SPORTIVO-GAUCCHI-ADOTTA-I-NAZIONALI-ETIOPI_152400.php> (accessed 5 August 2017).

⁵⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The State, Economics and Sport', *Sport in Society*, 1.2 (2007), 15–21.

⁵⁸ Jarvie, 'Introduction: Sport, Racism and Ethnicity', 1.

⁵⁹ Gabrielli, 'L'attività sportiva nelle colonie italiane durante il fascismo tra organizzazione del consenso, disciplinamento del tempo libero e "prestigio della razza"', 258.

International Sporting Events and the Politics of Representation

International sporting events such as the Olympics are frequently presented as a utopic image of our world, an example of peace and acceptance regulated by the unwritten rule of fair play. At the 2016 Rio Olympics there were twenty-four Italian athletes who were not born in Italy, and eight of them had African origins. These athletes represent the multicultural society that Italy is starting to recognize.⁶⁰ Although the members of the European Union are trying to contain the arrival of refugees into its territories, the 2016 Rio Olympics welcomed a refugee team of ten members. This optimistic view of the Olympics is celebrated in movies such as Jon Turteltaub's *Cool Runnings* (1990), which is based on the true story of the Jamaica bobsleigh team's presence at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Canada. The Jamaican underdogs lost the Olympics, but they became 'moral winners' because of their tenacity, stubborn strength, and resistance.

However, the values that the Olympics want to promote are not divorced from the 'civilizing role' that the West insists to have in relation to the rest of the world. The founding father of modern Olympic games, Pierre De Coubertin, stated this objective clearly and defined them 'a colonization of sport and a colonization by sport', indicating not merely the intention of replacing sports of uncivilized people with European sports, but also to civilize the rest of the world through sport.⁶¹ Indeed, the very choice of selecting some games and excluding others can be seen as a form of discrimination, since it does not allow some countries to successfully participate in the competitions they are stronger in. For instance, India in its sporting history has gained just twenty Olympic medals, but its most popular sports – including cricket, kho kho, and kabaddi – are not Olympic

60 Mauro Valeri, *Black Italians: Atleti neri in maglia azzurra* (Rome: Palombi Editori, 2006); Mohamed Abdalla Tailmoun, Mauro Valeri and Isaac Tesfaye, *Campioni d'Italia? Le seconde generazioni e lo sport* (Rome: Sinnos, 2014).

61 Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *Gender Politics and the Olympic Industry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21.

disciplines. De Coubertin 'clearly arranged the races along a hierarchy from inferior to superior',⁶² and his ideas about sport as a means of national cohesion and pride were welcomed by Italian Fascism, which 'organized Italian sport in relation to Olympic games'.⁶³

International sporting events can also be a place where racism is normalized. As John MacAloon argues, 'the discipline of anthropology and the Olympic Games both emerged out of a mash of theories and performance genres that were fermenting at the *fin de siècle*. This mash had been first stirred together in the mid-nineteenth century by the forces of exploration, colonization, imperialism, industrialization, and capitalism'.⁶⁴ In this concern, Helen Jefferson Lenskyj points out that the '[1904] Anthropology Days, held in conjunction with the Olympics, were intended to prove an association between "race" and athletic ability'.⁶⁵ The echoes of this racist association can be found in an interview held after the 2013 World Championships of gymnastics in Antwerp, when a member of the Italian team, Carlotta Ferlito, said that she should have painted her skin black in order to win the competition, therefore inferring that Simone Biles, the black US gymnast who won the all-around title, was favoured because of the colour of her skin.⁶⁶

62 Susan Brownell, 'Introduction. Bodies before Boas, Sport before the Laughter Left', in Susan Brownell, ed., *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games. Sport, Race, and American Imperialism* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2008), 14.

63 Antonio Lombardo, 'Il fascismo alle Olimpiadi', in Maria Canella and Sergio Giuntini, ed., *Sport e Fascismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009), 58. On Coubertin's concepts of race, see Antonio Lombardo, *Pierre de Coubertin. Saggio storico sulle Olimpiadi moderne (1880–1914)* (Turin: Rai Eri, 2000); John MacAloon, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Otto Schantz, 'Pierre de Coubertin's Concepts of Race, Nation, and Civilization', in Susan Brownell, ed., *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games. Sport, Race, and American Imperialism* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2008), 156–188.

64 MacAloon, *This Great Symbol*, 268.

65 Lenskyj, *Gender Politics and the Olympic Industry*, 60.

66 Philip Hersh, 'Italian gymnast, federation spokesman apologizes for racial remarks', *chicagotribune.com* <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-10-09/sports/chi-italian-gymnast-federation-spokesman-apologize-for-racial-insensitivity-20131009_1_gymnast-simone-biles-federation> (accessed 5 August 2017).

Moreover, sporting events can show an international audience the paradoxes of neocolonialism. For instance, Feyisa Lilesa raised his hands and crossed his wrists above his head as he approached the finish line at the Rio Olympic marathon in 2016 in order to denounce the violence of the Ethiopian government against the Oromo population, which is the victim of land grabbing for the creation of plantations on a large scale. Foreign businesses such as the Italian company Salini-Impregilo are contributing to this project and are constructing the a large dam in Omo valley. According to Survival International, the realization of these large infrastructural works is committing violations of human rights.⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that Sergio Mattarella, the president of Italy since 2015, went to Ethiopia in the Summer of 2015 to meet Italian businessmen who are working on this project, and he also met Ethiopian partisans and recognized the atrocities carried out in Ethiopia.⁶⁸ This event shows how the memory of colonialism can be used as a token to endorse Italian business abroad and commit new exploitation of a land that was previously colonized by Italians.

The examples presented in this chapter show the relevance of sport for the study of postcolonial cultures. Looking at how some athletes of African origins are represented in literature and newspapers shows the reception of transnational migrations and the colonial legacy in popular culture. The refugee crisis in some

67 'Survival International vs. Sani Impregilo', *oecdwatch.org* <http://www.oecdwatch.org/cases/Case_459> (accessed 5 August 2017).

68 Martirano, Dino, 'Etiopia: l'omaggio di Mattarella ai partigiani scampati al raid del '37', *corriere.it* <http://www.corriere.it/esteri/16_marzo_15/etiopia-l-omaggio-mattarella-a67bo772-eabo-11e5-bfc8-bo5a661f1950.shtml> (accessed 4 August 2017). For further information about Italian business in the Omo Valley, see Giulia Franchi and Luca Manes 'Cosa c'è da nascondere nella valle dell'Omo? Le mille ombre del sistema Italia in Etiopia', *recommon.org* <<http://www.recommon.org/che-cosa-ce-da-nascondere-nella-valle-dellomo/>> (accessed 5 August 2017). It is interesting to note that with a law made 'ad hoc' for the 2006 Turin winter Olympics (Law of February 21, 2006, no. 49, art. 1 ter), the Italian government allowed 44,000 Beretta 92 pistols to be sold abroad, and many of them were later found in the hands of Iraqi rebels. See Peter Gomez and Marco Lillo, 'Beretta Connection', *espresso.repubblica.it* <<http://espresso.repubblica.it/palazzo/2006/03/02/news/beretta-connection-1.602>> (accessed 5 August 2017).

parts of Africa draws the attention of writers and readers to stories of survival of refugees from war and their integration in the welcoming society through sport, such as Warren St. John's *Outcast United* (2009), Lopez Lomong and Mark A. Tabb's *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games*⁶⁹ and Lawrence Hill's *The Illegal*.⁷⁰ In Italy, the most successful of this sub-genre of sport stories is Giuseppe Catozzella's *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*. The book sold 100,000 copies in Italy, was awarded important prizes such as the 'Premio Strega Giovani' 2014, has been translated in several languages, and a movie based on the book is currently under production. Because of the merits of this novel, Catozzella has also been nominated Goodwill Ambassador by the United Nations.

Although both Catozzella and Reinhard Kleist claimed that their main source of information is Hodan Yusuf Oman, the sister of Samia⁷¹ their stories diverge significantly. In Kleist's *An Olympic Dream* Samia entertains her closest relationship with her sisters⁷² while in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* Samia has an inseparable male best friend called Ali. While Samia affirms that war 'had nothing to do' with her and Ali, and that by pretending they could actually become invisible,⁷³ *An Olympic Dream* recounts that every time Samia walks in the streets of Mogadishu, she is the target of Al-Shabaab's militia.⁷⁴ Another relevant difference between the two novels is the representation of Samia's social class. Samia's house in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* is presented as a place that 'wasn't even a house in the normal sense of the word'⁷⁵ and its walls are made of 'a mixture of mud and twigs, which hardened in the sun'.⁷⁶ In *An Olympic Dream* Samia's house is presented instead as a middle-class environment, showing that her family had the privilege to allow their daughter to

69 Lopez Lomong and Mark Tabb, *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (London: Harper Collins, 2012).

70 Lawrence Hill, *The Illegal* (London: Harpercollins, 2015).

71 Giuseppe Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 243; and Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 7.

72 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 28.

73 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 9.

74 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 24; 30.

75 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 3.

76 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 3.

train for the Olympics.⁷⁷ The walls of Samia's house show a poster of her idol, 'Abdi Bile', a Somali middle distance runner.⁷⁸ On the other hand, in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* Samia is a fan of Mo Farah, and she is convinced that she and Mo will 'show the way for the liberation of women and then lead our country out of war'.⁷⁹ Samia is frequently portrayed not only as a 'Somali and as a Muslim woman',⁸⁰ but also as a woman who is fighting for 'the liberation of my people and of women of Islam'.⁸¹ If Samia represented Muslim women, it could be argued that she would not worship Mo Farah's picture,⁸² because this would mean to worship an idol, a practice that is against Islam. Samia describes Mo Farah as 'the opposite of me. By the time he was nine, he had already moved to England, so naturally it all seemed normal to him'.⁸³ In this passage it is not only interesting to note the admiration of a Somali woman athlete for her British male colleague, but also the use of the term 'normal' to identify the condition of those who live in the United Kingdom. In this regard, it should also be noted that when Mo Farah won his second Olympic gold medal in both the 5,000 m and 10,000 m at the 2016 Olympics of Rio, he was acclaimed by the *Daily Mail* – a newspaper very hostile to foreigners, especially Muslims – as 'the greatest British sportsman of all time'. This celebration shows that readers of this newspaper perceived Farah as different from foreigners who do not win medals and have no athletic merits.

In *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* Samia's father has a prominent role. He describes his daughter as a 'little warrior running for freedom', who will lead 'Somali women to liberation from the bondage in which men have placed them'.⁸⁴ One of the titles of the English translation of the novel, *Little Warrior*,⁸⁵ particularly emphasizes the endorsement of Samia's father to his

77 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 41.

78 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 22.

79 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 54.

80 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 150.

81 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 46.

82 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 89.

83 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 143.

84 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 44.

85 Giuseppe Catozzella, *Little Warrior*, trans. by Anne Milano Appel (London: Faber and Faber, 2016).

daughter, by identifying Samia with one of the stereotypical features that are associated with female athletes, that of being 'aggressive and dominating'.⁸⁶ In Catozzella's novel, Somali society is described as patriarchal and the tragedy of Somalia is associated with the death of Samia's father.⁸⁷ All women, except for Samia, are victims of Al-Shabaab's rule, which imposes the requirement to wear a 'black burka'.⁸⁸ In *An Olympic Dream* instead Samia's father is dead,⁸⁹ and Samia's mother has a more important role among Samia's relatives. She is not only described as a caring figure, but also as a woman who ironizes about the TV commentators who say that her daughter is 'too thin' (Figure 10.1).⁹⁰



Figure 10.1: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia's mother watches her daughter on TV.

Another important character of *An Olympic Dream* is Samia's aunt. The reasons why Samia travels to Italy is that she is fed up with Al-Shabaab in Somalia, she does not have papers to work in Djibouti and Addis Abeba, and she has an aunt called Maryam who suggests that she go to Italy thanks to a friend who could help her.⁹¹ Along with her insecurity stemming from the

86 Tessa Lovell, 'Sport, Racism and Young Women', in Grant Jarvie, ed., *Sport Racism and Ethnicity* (London; New York; Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1991), 44.

87 Catozzella, *Don't Tell me You Are Afraid*, 158.

88 Catozzella, *Don't Tell me You Are Afraid*, 85.

89 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 34.

90 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 15.

91 Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 52.

social and political collapse of Somalia during the civil war, Samia's choice to leave Somalia in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* is motivated by her fascination with Europe. Samia says she feels unfit for the 'modernity' of Europeans, and she wonders whether she carries her 'country's lethargy in [her] bones'.⁹² It is true that Samia is escaping from war, but the use of such different concepts to characterize Europe and Africa seems aimed at reassuring readers of their own privilege, rather than trying to give voice to the thoughts of a young woman who is aware of the discrimination of many of her countrymates in Europe thanks to the internet. The significant distance between Samia and other Africans in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* is emphasized by the fact that she calls her travel companions to Europe 'silent ghosts',⁹³ identifying a distance between her and a mass of nameless people with which she does not empathize. In *An Olympic Dream* instead, we hear the story of a migrant fisherman (Figure 10.2)⁹⁴ and Samia consoles a baby who is crying in a boat before dying, thus sympathizing with him (Figure 10.3).⁹⁵



Figure 10.2: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. The story of the fisherman.

⁹² Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 135.

⁹³ Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 225.

⁹⁴ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 79–84.

⁹⁵ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 135.



Figure 10.3: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia takes a crying baby into her arms on the boat to Italy.

A last but very important element to analyse is the point of view through which this 'true' story is narrated. The back cover of *An Olympic Dream* argues that Kleist 'tells this true story in the name of countless other refugees'. However, the author of this graphic novel admits having fictionalized certain passages, because of the limits that a European man can have in his knowledge of Somalia:

many descriptions of the events during Samia Yusuf Omar's nearly year-long journey were incomplete or not fully comprehensible, so I used pieces of reports by other refugees and in some cases filled in the blanks myself. I used my imagination to depict how people would handle such a situation, how they would think and feel, how they would react. And many of the real events related here are, for a European like me, quite incomprehensible.⁹⁶

Kleist also argues that 'the Facebook messages in this book are used to disseminate information to the reader, and for this reason I have fictionalized

⁹⁶ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 7.

most of them, except from one: her desperate call for help from Tripoli, which she had addressed to Teresa Krug'.⁹⁷ The choice of mediating the interaction between the readers and Samia through a social media – the graphic novel closes with Abdi Bile's video on YouTube announcing Samia's death⁹⁸ – is aimed at stressing that Kleist's reconstruction of Samia's life is just one possible account. In a panel of the graphic novel, Samia reflects upon how to present herself to her fans, therefore showing that Facebook posts cannot be seen as a trustworthy reflection of her feelings and thoughts (Figure 10.4).⁹⁹



Figure 10.4: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia writes a Facebook post.

Catozzella has instead argued that 'everything. Details, characters, dates, stages of Samia's travel through Africa' is true and verified.¹⁰⁰ He has also affirmed that his work is the result of a 'a very difficult job of equilibrium between documentation and impersonification'.¹⁰¹ However, *Don't Tell*

⁹⁷ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 7.

⁹⁸ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 141–143.

⁹⁹ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 104.

¹⁰⁰ Nucini, Silvia 'E tu, dov'eri quando sono morta?', *vanityfair.it* <<http://www.vanityfair.it/news/mondo/14/01/17/storia-samila-lampedusa-olimpiadi>> (accessed 12 February 2016).

¹⁰¹ Giuseppe Catozzella, 'Si può vivere nei panni di un altro? Ecco la grande sfida della letteratura', *Avvenire* (27 September 2014).

Me You Are Afraid mentions none of the relevant sources consulted. The novel refers to the presence of Italians in Somalia twice, by mentioning the construction of a monument, the Altare della Patria,¹⁰² and 'the sewage system built by the Italians'.¹⁰³ By listing only the architecture built by Italians in Mogadishu, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* does not seem to challenge the myth of the Italians as good colonizers. Moreover, Italians did not build Mogadishu and its sewage system, as the first written acknowledgements of the city are dated 1228.¹⁰⁴

Catozzella's impersonification with Samia could benefit from a closer examination. *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* presents an autodiegetic narrator: Catozzella tells the story of Samia using the first singular person. This choice could seem particularly controversial given the acritical view that Samia has of the Olympics and her participation in this event. Samia runs in order to free her country,¹⁰⁵ and 'redeem an entire people'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, she thinks that 'one day [she] would manage to win the Olympics, and [she] would have do it as a Somali and a Muslim woman'.¹⁰⁷ In *An Olympic Dream* instead Samia wants to go to London in order to 'do better' than Beijing,¹⁰⁸ to escape from Al-Shabaab's Somalia, and to support her family (Figure 10.5).¹⁰⁹ However, she is aware that her times are not good enough to qualify for an Olympic Games and her only chance to participate to the Olympics is to be selected among the two non-qualified athletes that countries in war such as Somalia can select to represent them.¹¹⁰

¹⁰² Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 7. The fact that the 'Altare della Patria' was built by the Italians is lost in Anne Milano Appel's translation of the *Non dirmi che hai paura* as this expression is translated as 'national monument'.

¹⁰³ Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Chittrick, Neville, 'Medieval Mogadishu', *Paideuma* 28 (1982), 49.

¹⁰⁵ Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 90.

¹⁰⁶ Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 108, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁷ Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 150.

¹⁰⁸ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 41.

¹¹⁰ Kleist, *An Olympic Dream*, 43.

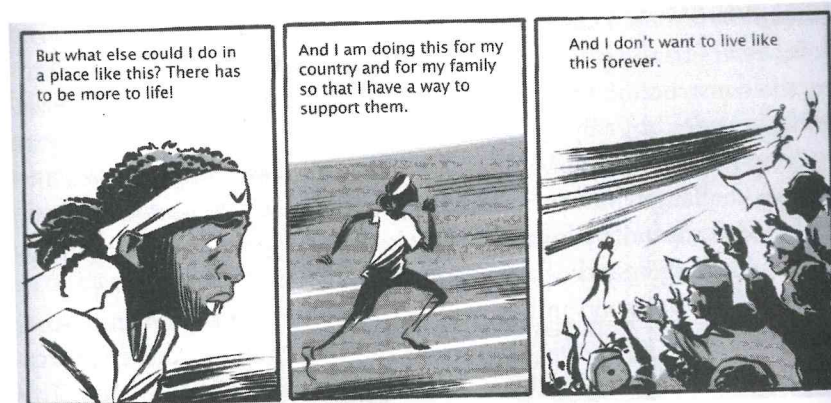


Figure 10.5: Panel from *An Olympic Dream*. Samia explains some of the reasons why she wants to leave Somalia.

The emphasis on Samia's innocence in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* is functional to depict her as a heroine, but she often seems not to have understood her limits and possibility, posing questions about her self-declared role of representative of all 'Muslim women'. Moreover, it could be noted that rarely in history has the right to participate to a sport events brought social and civil rights. For instance, Colin Tatz has demonstrated that aboriginal people in Australia could take part in national sports half a century before their rights as citizens were recognized.¹¹¹ Talking of the political responsibility of the athlete, the former Olympic 1,500-metre gold medallist Haile Gebreselassie commented that 'eradicating poverty, this is all that matters in my country. When I am training I think about this a lot; when I am running it is going over in my mind – as a country we cannot move forward until we eradicate poverty and whereas sport can help – the real problems will not be overcome just by helping Ethiopians to run fast'.¹¹² On the other hand, Catozzella's Samia describes the Olympics as 'a fantasy world [...] an incredible immersion in the warm, multihued heart that is universal love, whose different colors are nothing more than distinctive patches

111 Colin Tatz, *Aborigines in Sport* (Bedford Park: Flinders University Press, 1987), 5.
112 Quoted in Grant Jarvie, *Sport, Culture and Society. An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), 297.

that strengthen it and allow the world to breathe'.¹¹³ She even affirms that: 'one day I would win the Olympics, and when that day came, I would indeed lead the resurgence of Muslim women'.¹¹⁴ Samia is described as a hero, who shows Muslim women that they have to Westernize in order to be safe from a patriarchal culture, by following a very common stereotype in Western countries, which Lila Abu-Lughod brilliantly discusses in her landmark essay *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*¹¹⁵

The disattention to the historic and geographical context in which the 'true' story is set, is further emphasized in Catozzella's latest novel *Il grande futuro* [The Great Future].¹¹⁶ This novel is set at the border between Somalia and Kenya and describes the friendship between a rich and a poor boy, Ahmed and Amal, who are divided because of the war: Amal joins the *Neri* [Black army] of radical Islam, and Ahmed the regular army, becoming its most valiant warrior, Omar the Great. The presence of a child 'warrior', the use of a first person autodiegetic narrator, and the cover chosen for this book – two birds which resemble the butterfly in the cover of Catozzella's previous novel – seem to indicate its relation of proximity with *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*. In an interview with Gabriella Grasso, Catozzella argues that he has 'changed reality, trying to make it become a fairy-tale or a legend', because he wanted to 'render [the story] the most universal possible'.¹¹⁷

This interview makes us wonder what the limits of the definition of 'true story' are, and whether the intention to write a fictional story is also present in *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*. It also can make us question to what extent other 'true stories' about Africa contribute to shape our

113 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 138.
114 Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 104.
115 Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). For an overview of how Muslims and Islam are represented in the Italian context, see Charles Burdett, *Italy, Islam and the Islamic World. Representations and Reflections, from 9/11 to the Arab Uprisings* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015).
116 Giuseppe Catozzella, *Il grande futuro* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2016).
117 Gabriella Grasso, 'Il grande futuro. Intervista a Giuseppe Catozzella', *qcodemag.it* <<http://www.qcodemag.it/2016/01/31/54226>> (accessed 5 August 2017).

idea of this continent. Both *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* and *An Olympic Dream* show that sport might be a source of empowerment and to tell the story of a woman who is active in challenging hostile situations and circumstances. Despite both novels being based on the same true story and raising awareness about refugees' issues, they provide a radically different view on the story of Samia. Catozzella celebrates the Olympic Games as a utopian social space and depicts Samia as a model for all Muslim women. Therefore, Catozzella's aim is to write what the English translator of *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* defines as a 'moving story'.¹¹⁸ Kleist is interested in exploring Samia's relationships with other Somali women in her family and her relationship with other refugees.

Sport and Selective Memory

As Giusi Baldissoni and Edoardo Tortarolo's edited volume on the relation between literature and sport in Italy demonstrates, most Italian writers after fascism did not give much attention to sport, as it was not considered a relevant cultural topic.¹¹⁹ This chapter suggests that one of the reasons that this topic has been neglected is its ties to another disregarded theme in Italian culture and history: the racist legacy of Italian colonialism. Indeed, the fact that *L'inattesa piega degli eventi* and *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid* – two successful Italian novels set in countries that were former Italian colonies – both deal with sport seems to indicate that this social and cultural practice is important to understand the colonial and postcolonial encounter between Italy and the Horn of Africa.

As sport was a fundamental narrative tool to preserve the myth of race and to exclude or include people along racial lines, it is a useful theme to explore in order not only to understand the legacy of colonial

¹¹⁸ Anne Milano Appel, 'Translator's Note', in Catozzella, *Don't Tell Me You Are Afraid*, 245.

¹¹⁹ Giusi Baldissoni and Edoardo Tortarolo, *L'esperienza sportiva nella cultura contemporanea* (Novara: Interlinea, 2005).

encounters, but also to evaluate whether the diffusion of modern sports from Europe and the United States to the rest of the world can be considered a form of cultural imperialism and create a global context of sporting inequality.¹²⁰ These considerations are necessary in order to challenge the views of those who see in the 'disproportionately high level of athletic participation by various ethnic minority cultures' in sport the demonstration that this field 'is relatively free from racism and [...] enjoys a certain degree of democratization and equality'.¹²¹ On the contrary, it seems that 'the key features of sporting success – youth, physical fitness and prowess – are not 'a potent and quick-acting meritocratic method of achieving beneficial social objectives' and dissolve social division.¹²² The analysis of how athletes are represented raises questions about the ethics of fiction. What are limits of 'realism' when it comes to describing non-Western cultures? To what extent is this 'realism' shaped by the long-lasting relationships between Europe and Africa? And, most importantly, to what extent can a third party speak for those whose voices are often left unheard?

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¹²⁰ Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹²¹ Jarvie, 'Introduction: Sport, Racism and Ethnicity', 1.

¹²² Jarvie, 'Introduction: Sport, Racism and Ethnicity', 1.

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Filmography

Cool Runnings, dir. Jon Turteltaub (1990).

EMMA BOND

II Photography: Memorial Intertexts in New Writing by Maaza Mengiste, Nadifa Mohamed, and Igiaba Scego

No doubt about it: looking is power, but so also is the ability to make somebody look.¹

Recently I came across a rather disquieting photograph which was taken in the city where I live, Edinburgh (Figure 11.1). Following the success of the Scottish National Exhibition, which had been held in the Saughton area of the capital in 1908, local entrepreneurs decided to try and create a more permanent version in the seaside suburb of Portobello. They struck on the 27 acres of the 'Marine Gardens' complex, with its grand pavilions and halls, and opened them on 31 May 1909 as a tourist attraction. An astounding 750,000 visitors flocked to the Gardens in the first year alone. The photograph I refer to shows one attraction of the exhibition complex: an entire 'Somali village', composed of straw huts inhabited by seventy individuals who had been transported from Somaliland, via London, and were then displayed in traditional dress and weaponry for the pleasure and curiosity of the Scottish public.² The fact itself is

1 Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 90.

2 It is crucial to exercise caution when discussing the agency of performers of this period, to avoid replicating a victimizing narrative which can risk flattening what is inevitably a diverse range of experiences. From the 1880s onwards, there was a growing professionalization in the field, and most performers had contracts with recruiters, which offered them improved wages and conditions. Performances were seen more as salaried work than coerced labour, with some village elders flying back and forth from Europe to Africa to 'manage' various villages. Blanchard

uncomfortable to absorb, but when I came across the image, what concerned me just as much was how I could respond to the image *in that moment* in a way that would bypass a new form of 'racializing vision' on my part as a spectator.³ Looking at something is not synonymous with understanding it, and as Alphonso Lingis states in *Foreign Bodies*: 'we can see without necessarily seeing things'.⁴ My aim in this chapter is therefore to use this photograph, and my own affective response to it, as a way to construct a model of 'countervisuality' that draws on Nicholas Mirzoeff's own formula.⁵ This is a 'countervisuality' that can be applied to other contexts, a reversal of gazes that is capable of activating visual 'traces' and cultural remnants that hold the power to disrupt the present and change the future, through 'embodied practices' of engagement.⁶

et al. estimate that 2,000–3,000 'native performers' were employed in a dozen or so countries in any one year at a time. See Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Eric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire, 'Introduction', in Pascal Blanchard *et al.*, eds, *Human Zoos: The Greatest Exotic Shows in the West* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 14.

- 3 Mirzoeff discusses precisely the 'ambivalence and undecidability' that affects both black and white spectators of colonial photographs. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (London; New York, Routledge, 1995), 140. And going back to the initial dynamic of spectatorship, Qureshi explains how the village installations constructed performers as visual objects: 'For consumers, indigenous villages and their inhabitants were able to function as three-dimensional object lessons that could be touched, looked at, talked to, and critically walked around and through'. Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire and Anthropology in 19th-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 255.
- 4 Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies* (New York; London: Routledge, 1994), 21.
- 5 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 5.
- 6 Alia Al-Saji, 'A Phenomenology of Hesitation. Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing', in Emily S. Lee, ed., *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014), 162.

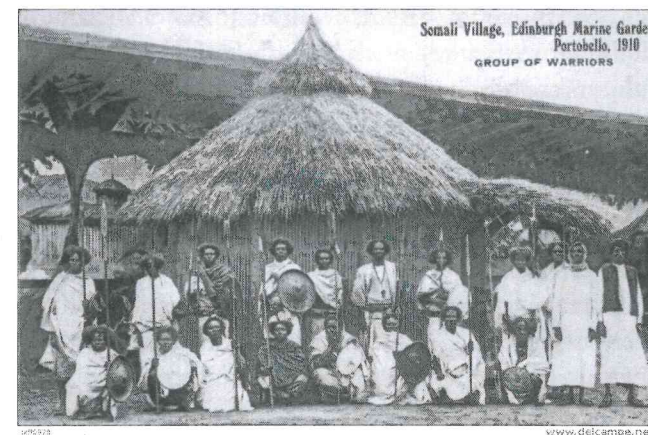


Figure 11.1: Somali Village, Edinburgh Marine Gardens, Portobello, 1910 – Group of Warriors. Public domain postcard.

The specificity of this particular image is important, and it functions here not only as a means to open a debate around the dynamics of spectatorship, power and knowledge that habitually mediate the reception of colonial and postcolonial imagery. As the photograph of a group of Somali nationals photographed far away from Africa just one year after one part of their homeland had been officially renamed 'Somalia italiana', its subjects operate within an obliquely postcolonial framework that highlights the transnational complexities of the contemporary diaspora. Since my aim here is to privilege the *diverse* nature of diasporic expression, the present chapter will look at engagement with colonial imagery in texts by three women authors of the East African diaspora now based in different countries: Nadifa Mohamed (who was born in Somaliland and brought up in the United Kingdom), Maaza Mengiste (an Ethiopian-American writer now based in New York), and Igiaba Scego (born to Somali parents in Rome and raised in Italy). And specifically, I will explore the use of primary photographic sources in narratives dealing with the Italian colonial era in the Horn of Africa by these writers. By 'use', I mean both the active role that primary photographs have in inspiring authors in the formation of their narratives, but also by means of an analysis of the insertion of image descriptors within texts. This engagement between visual culture

and written literature is important, because as Shawn Michelle Smith has explained: 'literature is a key site through which looking is learned and viewing subjects are produced'.⁷ I will therefore seek to engage with various theories of the construction of difference in colonial photographs, as well as those emphasizing the importance of the gaze and of the physicality of images themselves, in order to argue for a re-evaluation of the role of photographs as intertext in recent works by the three authors.

What I seek to elucidate in each case is the importance of the contextualization of primary visual sources, the active construction of links between past and present that such sources allow, and the subsequent elaboration of images within a wider context of creative production. I want to suggest that employing the sort of 'hesitation' that Alia Al-Saji suggests is crucial in looking at these images, so that looking becomes a process of waiting, imagining, and remembering that allows for affect to develop, for one to 'feel one's way tentatively and receptively' through the subjective negotiation of the image.⁸ Through employing a set of critical pauses in my analysis of the three writers' work, I will identify a sense of progression that takes us from the racializing gaze exposed in the visual pleasure taken in exploring the Black body in *Black Mamba Boy*, to the white colonial body becoming photographic subject, reversing a position of seeming anonymity, in Maaza Mengiste's comments on *The Shadow King*, to the photographs inserted with Scego's *Adua* and *Roma negata*, which see diverse postcolonial subjects looking back at the viewer. This journey toward the reversal of the gaze allows for a 'claim to autonomy, political subjectivity and collectivity' on the part of both historical and contemporary subjects.⁹ And this is where the initial image I used in the introduction above becomes so crucial to the illustration of my overall argument. In the 'afterimage' that South African playwright and artist Brett Bailey has created to re-evoke 'human zoos', and which I will draw on in my conclusion to this chapter, the disruptive power afforded to Black subjects through the opportunity to 'look back'

- 7 Shawn Michelle Smith, 'Introduction: Visual Culture and Race', *MELUS Multi-Ethic Literature of the US*, 39.2 (2014), 6.
 8 Al-Saji, 'A Phenomenology of Hesitation', 142.
 9 Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.

allows us to map out the importance of reversing such gazes, and look from the disparate places of diaspora and the marginalized space of gendered voices back to the originally cast cultural and political metropolitan centre. As a final coda, I will discuss how the sometimes subversive employment of colonial imagery can take on a powerful political and ethical charge, something which allows me to place the narratives under examination into an interdisciplinary dialogue with contemporary African and diasporic visual artists such as Maud Sulter, Omar Diop, Nomusa Makhubu and the African Digital Arts collective. The element of *play*, bricolage, and re-appropriation that are performed in these artists' work responds explicitly to bell hooks' words in *Black Looks*. Hooks quotes Stuart Hall as saying that: 'a full understanding of the trauma of the colonial experience is only possible through recognizing the connection between domination and representation'.¹⁰ She continues to suggest that the 'pain of learning [black people] cannot control our images, how we see ourselves, or how we are seen is so intense that it rends us. It rips and tears at the seams of our efforts to construct self and identity'.¹¹ This evocation of an impulse to rip, and to tear, is enacted and yet simultaneously healed, reconstituted through practices of intermedial collage by all of the writers and the artists featured in my discussion. As hooks says:

It is also about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews [...] making a space for the transgressive image, the outlaw rebel vision, is essential to any effort to create the context for transformation.¹²

And this element of potential transformation suggests a hopefully positive ethical endpoint to my discussion, in that such creative interventions into the past function as recuperations that allow for 'new ways to imagine and make the future'.¹³

- 10 bell hooks, 'In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life', in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 3.
 11 hooks, 'In Our Glory', 4.
 12 hooks, 'In Our Glory', 4.
 13 hooks, 'In Our Glory', 5.

*

Despite the significance of the date of the appearance of the Somali troupe at the Marine Gardens exhibition, the Italian colonial adventure in the Horn of Africa had actually started forty years before the Edinburgh photograph was taken. This is a chapter of Italian history that is too seldom remembered within the colonizing country itself, and when discussed, it is more often seen as part of a distant, 'foreign' context, one that has had little long-lasting impact or effect on Italy or on Italian culture at large.¹⁴ But this partially submerged history is now being reclaimed by women writers of the diaspora such as Nadifa Mohamed, Maaza Mengiste and Igiaba Scego as part of a diverse, multi-voiced conversation which directly links these past events to issues regarding race, racism, and migration in Italian society today. Their engagement with original visual material and their insistence on linking the past to the present through the interface of text and image in fiction or fictionalized narratives allows them to re-appropriate history through a process of reversing 'the epistemological impotency of vision'.¹⁵

A lot of very valuable critical work has already been done into analysing colonial photographs, and David Forgacs has written extensively on the link between sexual and territorial domination that emerges through

- 14 This distancing of the Italian colonial enterprise from Italy itself could be seen to function in much the same way as the 'human zoo' phenomenon, in its creation of 'elsewhere' spaces composed of curiosity and fantasy. See Blanchard *et al.*, 2. It is also important to remember that such 'living ethnographical exhibitions' were a popular feature in Italy itself too – the first was held in 1884 in Turin, and featured natives of Assab, then in Palermo in 1891–1892 (exalting the 'civilizing' Italian colonial enterprise in Eritrea), Milan in 1906, Turin in 1911, Genoa in 1914 (celebrating the conquest of Libya), Turin in 1928, Rome in 1931, and lastly in Naples in 1940. See Guido Abbattista and Nicola Labanca, 'Living Ethnographical and Colonial Exhibitions in Liberal and Fascist Italy', in Pascal Blanchard *et al.*, eds, *Human Zoos*, 341–352.
- 15 Shawn Michelle Smith, 'Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Others: W. E. B. Du Bois's Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition', *African American Review*, 34.4 (2000), 589.

careful analysis of colonial era photography in Italian East Africa.¹⁶ But what I want to do here is to move the discourse forward to encompass a more creative evaluation of photography as a potential narrative inter-text which might point the way toward a multidirectional imagining of both past and future. Crucially, I will argue that such insertions do not have to be *visual*. Marianne Hirsch has written convincingly about the importance of *descriptions* of photographs – as she says, descriptions move beyond the fixity of images, allowing for a process of transformation and translation of images into what she calls 'prose pictures': 'Writing the image [...] undoes the objectification of the still photograph and thereby takes it out of the realm of stasis, immobility, mortification – what Roland Barthes calls "flat death" – into fluidity, movement, and thus, finally, life'.¹⁷ This interface will allow me to chart the ability of the narratives under discussion to create a new space for cultural memory, made up of the 'leftovers, debris, single items that are left to be collected and assembled in many ways, to tell a variety of stories, from a variety of often competing narratives'.¹⁸ In this way, both images and image descriptors can function as active interventions, resistances, and revisions of history. Their evocation can succeed in bringing past images *back* to the present, and in carrying them forward into the future. I argue that their action of laying claim to a shared history within the public domain establishes a wider, more inclusive notion of collective memory and thereby also works toward establishing a shared ethos of reconciliation. This is achieved by envisioning literature as a form of visual culture in which the 'afterimages' of colonialism function as residues or traces of history that force the reader-spectator to 'remember' a shared legacy.¹⁹ Such visual imprints remind us that it is the 'afterlife' of the colonial

- 16 See David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 78.
- 17 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4.
- 18 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 13.
- 19 See Shawn Michelle Smith, 'Afterimages: White Womanhood, Lynching and the War on Iraq', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 20 (2006), 72–85.

mission in East Africa that needs to be contextualized within different interpretative frameworks in order to disrupt the 'passivity of spectators, denaturalizing images and viewing positions'.²⁰

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The first author I want to discuss, Nadifa Mohamed, was born in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in 1981, and moved to the United Kingdom when she was four years old. Her debut novel *Black Mamba Boy* (2010) traces the true story of the arduous journey her father made across East Africa and the Middle East as a youth between 1935 and 1947, following the deaths of both his parents. Although richly autobiographical, Nadifa Mohamed weaves fictional elements into her father's account, making it a hybrid tale of the disruptions caused by colonialism and war, and the road towards a new transnational future. Newly orphaned and alone in Eritrea in 1936, Jama enlists as an *ascari* conscript in the Italian fascist army, and the five years that he spends with the forces, up to the Allied defeat in Ethiopia in 1941, is the section of the narrative that I want to focus on here. It is the first time that Jama comes across photographs as objects, and the photographs that he encounters are images that have been taken by his boss, Major Lorenzo Leon. Leon intends to study anthropology when he returns back to Italy, so has taken photographs of the local villagers and notes on their lifestyles and societies, photographs that Jama finds when he is sent to fetch something from Lorenzo's room.

They were mainly head and profile shots of the local Bilen peasants. [...] The last picture was of a teenage Bilen girl, topless, her arms wrapped around her waist, her expression hidden by ornate gold chains that draped down her forehead and from nose to ear. Jama's eyes scanned the incredible image. He had only ever seen his mother naked, but this girl looked like a mythical creature, unearthly, he could not tell where or when it had been taken. Sa'frullah, God forgive us, he said under his breath.²¹

²⁰ Smith, 'Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Others', 586.
²¹ Nadifa Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy* (London: Harper Collins, 2010), 142.

The lack of contextualization in the framing of the image (signaled by the fact that Jama cannot tell where or when the photograph had been taken) reifies the girl into a seemingly unknowable symbol of otherness. This recalls Forgacs' descriptions of the individuals in similar colonial images as rendered 'deindividualized and nameless',²² evidence of which is further seen in the description of the Bilen girl as 'mythical, unearthly'. The gold chains that hide her expression from the viewer guarantee the absence of any mutuality of gaze, and the image provokes a reaction of shame rather than pleasure in Jama himself. The next episode sees another Italian fascist official taking a different kind of trophy photographs:

He ordered askaris in from outside and with great happiness told them to hold him up in the air, four emaciated Eritreans and a Somali manoeuvred him onto their shoulders and grimaced under his weight. 'Take a picture quickly, take it!' shouted the Italian, as giddy as a schoolgirl; the askaris looked down as their shame was memorialised. The Italian's buttocks reeked of too much rich food, and his monstrous thighs felt like pythons around their necks. The other Italians applauded and wolf whistled at him, and as soon as he came down, they all wanted to take a similar photograph to send to their brothers, fathers, wives.²³

As illustrated above, such demeaning photographs were commonly circulated in Italy, as well as photographs of more violent colonial atrocities (as we will go on to see), such as those documenting the reprisals following acts of resistance against the occupying forces. One such postcard described within the narrative seems also to be in circulation within Africa itself, and Jama witnesses its disturbing image in a scene set in Keren, Eritrea, in 1941:

One askari had a postcard he had bought from a hawker in Mogadishu and he showed it to Jama and the boys. They squinted at the picture of the lorry unable to see anything of interest. 'Allah!' shouted Abdi, and he pointed to the shackled hands that hung off the back of the lorry. The hands were piously cupped as if in

²² Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*, 93.

²³ Nadifa, *Black Mamba Boy*, 151.

prayer but the wrists were angry, shredded stumps, inscribing their curses in bloody script onto the dusty road.²⁴

This trope of the objectification, then destruction and dismemberment of the Black body within the narrative culminates in the torture and murder of a young *ascari* conscript, Shidane, by three Italian fascist soldiers. This is an episode which is minutely recorded as if it is historical fact within the novel (particularly in sense that perpetrators are specifically named), and takes place against a backdrop of general indifference or even curiosity within the Italian army camp.

Many would pass by the shack when they heard what was happening in there. some hung around to watch but most drank in the sight and then scampered away like little boys who had seen up their teacher's skirt but didn't want to be caught staring. [...] They were relentless; they toiled over him, like mechanics pulling a car apart for scrap, vandals destroying a masterpiece, they dissected Shidane. They needed to see how his strange, beautiful black body operated, so they tore it up, raided it, it took hours but they were dedicated labourers.²⁵

The fascination with the Black body that Nadifa Mohamed emphasizes here cannot help but recall the 'underlying visual pleasure in the exoticism and/or strangeness',²⁶ that the subjects displayed in theatre and village installations at the turn of the twentieth century would command in their spectators. Indeed, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Eric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire go on to remark that the 'body of the "savage"' was the key element in the ethnographic shows and displays they discuss,²⁷ bodies that straddled perceptions of the erotic and the monstrous to achieve complex and ambivalent reactions of both reverence and disgust. But equally interesting are Nadifa Mohamed's comments in a recent interview about how this torture and murder did not actually take place in the time and space that she describes within the novel, but that she transposed the instance back sixty years from a later atrocity, committed by Canadian UN peacekeepers

²⁴ Nadifa, *Black Mamba Boy*, 167.

²⁵ Nadifa, *Black Mamba Boy*, 175.

²⁶ Blanchard et al., 'Introduction: Human Zoos', 3.

²⁷ Blanchard et al., 'Introduction: Human Zoos', 25.

in a small town on the Ethiopian-Somali border in 1993. She describes the torture and murder of a boy named Shidane Arone by bored and violent soldiers, disappointed by the lack of action that they found in their assigned station, emphasizing the role of photographs themselves in her decision to bear witness to the atrocity.

It was the pictures, basically, the pictures of the real Shidane. [...] He was tortured to death, and they took pictures while doing so. So these pictures emerged, and more pictures would eventually emerge from the Italian and Belgian peace keepers. But there was nothing, no real response. [...] That was the first case I became aware of when I was about 14 or 15. I saw the pictures. They are horrifying. It never left me, especially the more I learned about the atrocities by these soldiers and peace keepers around the world, and by policemen sometimes as well. I just felt this connection to Shidane, the real Shidane. I felt guilt almost that he had to die like that, and there was no one to say no, he is valuable. He means something. He is not disposable. I think the Canadian government gave 15,000 dollars to his family, but he is worth more than that. So there was that. And when I was researching my father's story, and researching the Italian presence in Eritrea, the same trophy pictures appeared! Of Italians being carried on the shoulders of Somali and Eritrea *askaris*, and of piles of heads from Ethiopia, and similar pictures from the South of Somalia. People were dragged behind lorries to their death. So there was this real line, this connection, from the 1930s to the violence in the 1990s.²⁸

I find this multi-directional (to borrow Michael Rothberg's term²⁹) transposition incredibly effective in tracing a line of violence that runs from the colonial era to the contemporary, and the descriptions of photographs that bear witness to episodes of horror in both times reinforce and underpin this connection. In this sense, they evoke bodies (such as Shidane's) as material presences; as Maaza Mengiste says, 'specifically East African

²⁸ Bhakti Shringarpure, 'Conversation with Maaza Mengiste and Nadifa Mohamed', *Warscapes* <<http://www.warscapes.com/conversations/maaza-mengiste-nadifa-mohamed>> (accessed 17 February 2017).

²⁹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

bodies' that function as 'their own kinds of monuments and vessels of a still unnegotiated past in Italy'.³⁰

The second text that I want to look at is the latest novel to be published by Italian-Somali writer Igiaba Scego, *Adua* (2015). And the first episode to explore functions in dialogue with the description of the photographs that Jama finds in Lorenzo's drawer of the teenage girl in *Black Mamba Boy*. The photograph in question in *Adua* emerges during a scene in which the protagonist, Zoppe, is being tortured and interrogated by fascist soldiers in Rome. Zoppe has enlisted as a translator, aligning him with the *ascari* role taken on by Jama in Nadifa Mohamed's text, and the interrogation he is subjected to takes an even more sinister, personal direction.

'We've found an interesting photo among your personal effects'. Photo? They'd searched his room. 'Pretty girl, this one. How old is she? Nine? Ten? Her chest isn't too developed yet, I see... hmm...' Ayan, his sister. What chest was this guy talking about? She was still a child. He felt a wave of disgust. [...] 'It would be a shame if something happened to this little girl, don't you agree?' and then he snapped his fingers with a sound that to Zoppe was louder than the bells of St. Peter's. Snap. Snap. Snap. Beppe stepped forward. The scene went by so fast that Zoppe had almost no time to figure out what was happening. Beppe unzipped his fly, pulled out his penis, rubbed it for a minute and then released his warm spunk all over little Ayan's photo.³¹

The physical violence of the beating that Zoppe is undergoing is mirrored in the sexual threat that the soldiers promise to his young sister, and magnified even more in the disfigurement of her image by the bodily fluids

- 30 Maaza Mengiste, 'Bending History', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 38–39 (2016), 182–185.
 31 Scego, Igiaba, *Adua*, trans. by Jamie Richards (New York: New Vessel Press, 2017), 60–62. This novel was originally published in Italian: Igiaba Scego *Adua* (Florence: Giunti, 2015).

of the fascist soldier. The impulse to appropriate and possess the image may remind us of Forgacs's analysis, in which the use of photographs of women is identified as part of a dynamic that links sexual desire to territorial appropriation, one that uses the 'anchorage of the real to strengthen the fantasy of possession and the idea of control'.³²

Here too we find the presence of those same trophy images that Nadifa Mohamed also evoked, photographs of the victims of colonial atrocities that were subsequently circulated back to Italy. Zoppe says:

I saw mangled black bodies. Hanged men, houses burned down, hands cut off, decapitated heads stuck on spears [...] And I saw heads severed from their bodies placed on silver trays surrounded by people laughing. The heads belonged to Ethiopians and the smiling mouths to Italians. I saw them making fun of the corpses and taking pictures of them. Then I saw them wrapping the photos of the horrors to send as gifts to their girlfriends in Italy.³³

In both these cases the white racializing gaze constructs the Black bodies in such images as objects, and also as surfaces, as 'ontologically flat' (to borrow George Yancy's words³⁴). And the fixity of such images recalls Fanon's words: 'I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare'.³⁵

It is also a now-old photograph that lingers in his daughter Adua's possessions which functions as proof of Zoppe's collaboration with the Italian forces as a translator (something he has previously denied, perceiving it in retrospect to have been a shameful capitulation to the colonial enterprise). This is another image that Scego introduces as a reproduction (of sorts) of a real-life photograph which, just as with

- 32 Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*, 78.
 33 Scego, *Adua*, trans. by Jamie Richards, 147–148.
 34 George Yancy, 'White Gazes. What it Feels Like to Be an Essence', in Emily S. Lee, ed., *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014), 53, emphasis added.
 35 Cit. Yancy, 'White Gazes', 57.

Nadifa Mohamed, triggered the process of narrative creation and inspired the plot of the novel:

The novel also came from another inspiration. One day the Roman writer Giacometta Limentari showed me one of her childhood photos: of her as a little girl and three probably Somali askaris in the Prati neighborhood. It was the first anniversary of the conquest of Ethiopia and Mussolini put on a big parade on Via dei Fori Imperiali. It was an incredible photo. I looked at it and my heart filled with contradictory sensations. How pretty little Giacometta was, and how proud those three Somalis on foreign duty were. I also thought that those four people brought together by chance shared (even if they didn't know it at the time) a destiny. Giacometta, a Jewish girl, and the askaris, subjects of an African colony, would go through 1938 and its atrocious racial laws. That photo in a certain sense represented the calm before the storm.³⁶

And finally, in much the same way as the teenage Bilen girl that Jama sees in Leon's photographic collection in *Black Mamba Boy*, Adua herself is captured *visually* through the sexual exploitation she undergoes as a cinema actress in Italy. She is represented as the stereotypical 'tiger woman', through descriptions of her as a 'proud lioness', 'panther' and 'little kitten'.³⁷ Adua is constructed as an exoticized other, an aesthetic, filmic image which is also linked in the text to other, photographic images through mentions of the circulation of 'little photographs' and 'postcards'. Yet, crucially, this position of fixed subject, without agency, is critically reversed in the final pages of the novel, when Adua's husband gifts her a videocamera: 'And then he said, "Now you can film whatever you want, now you can tell your story however you think and you feel"'.³⁸ This recuperation of subjective agency can be productively linked to subversive practices of 'sousveillance', as explained by Simone Browne in her recent volume *Dark Matters*. As she explains, '(Steve) Mann developed the term "sousveillance" as a way of naming an active inversion of the power relations that surveillance entails. Sousveillance, for Mann, is acts of 'observing and recording by an entity

36 Scego, *Adua*, trans. by Jamie Richards, 181–182.

37 Scego, *Adua*, trans. by Jamie Richards, 131, 126.

38 Scego, *Adua*, trans. by Jamie Richards, 171.

not in a position of power or authority over the subject of theveillance, often done through the use of handheld or wearable cameras'.³⁹

This reversal of the gaze is also a powerful feature in Maaza Mengiste's upcoming second novel, *The Shadow King*. Inspired by a series of photographs of Ethiopian girls taken by Italian colonial soldiers that she found during archival work in Rome, Maaza Mengiste tries to reimagine the hidden histories behind these photos, both of the women featured and the men who took them. As such, Maaza Mengiste occupies a critical cultural position that allows her to 'unsettle the authority' of the original photographer's gaze and affirm her own right to gaze back.⁴⁰ As she states in a recent interview on the subject:

I was looking at old photographs of Italian soldiers once, and I found this one photo of a soldier sitting in front of a tent. The top buttons on his uniform have been unbuttoned, and he's disheveled. He hasn't shaved in a little while. His hair is a bit messy. But his eyes looked so worn out and tired. Just tired. Like he just wants to go home. And I kept coming back to that and not knowing why. I kept writing all these Ethiopian characters, and I kept looking to him – that picture – and then I realized he was a character in the book.⁴¹

In this way, Maaza Mengiste recuperates the Italian colonial soldier *as an image*, employing active imaginative work in order to reverse the habitually dominant dynamics of the colonial gaze. This is also the aim of Igiaba Scego's 2014 book, *Roma negata*,⁴² which takes the form of a guided walk about her hometown of Rome. Pausing at recognizable landmarks and squares, Scego goes beyond the existing physical content and layout of places

39 Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 19.

40 See Smith, 'Introduction: Visual Culture and Race', 3.

41 Madeline Ewbank, 'Envisioning Good and Evil: An Interview with Maaza Mengiste', *North by NorthWestern* <<http://www.northbynorthwestern.com/story/envisioning-good-and-evil-an-interview-with-maaza/>> (accessed 17 February 2017).

42 Igiaba Scego and Rino Bianchi, *Roma negata* (Rome: Ediesse, 2014).

in order to uncover the hidden histories and stories of colonialism that re-insert seemingly 'foreign' chapters into Italy's shared history. But *Roma negata* thus functions not only as a re-insertion of colonial stories within Italy's history, but also as a re-insertion of multiple pasts into its present, through the physical presences that already inhabit the national space. This is especially noticeable in the accompanying photographs taken by Rino Bianchi, which show present-day migrants in the same multiply inflected sites that Scego narrates – for example, in front of Stazione Termini, Viale Libia, and the old Cinema Impero. In this way, the photographs themselves reverse the entrenched dynamics of the colonial gaze, challenging the reader through their insistence on achieving an acknowledgement of the significance of their presence, claiming – as Mirzoeff would have it – the 'right to look' back.

In a similar spirit, purportedly, the South African artist Brett Bailey staged a controversial theatre installation piece entitled 'Exhibit B' at the Edinburgh Playfair Library as part of the International Festival in 2014 (and thus brings us back to same spatial forum as the Marine Gardens photo which opened this chapter). The installation aimed to re-present the spectacle of human zoos and their ability to degrade and objectify human subjects in a present-day context. The subversion was supposed to function not only through displaying images of the horrors of colonialism, but also through contemporary tableaux that Bailey calls 'found objects'.⁴³ These are representations of refugees and asylum-seekers that link today's 'deportation centres, racial profiling and reduction of people to numbers to the dehumanizing ethos of the human zoos'.⁴⁴ In this way, Bailey aimed to personify the link between past archetypes and present racism and attribute modern discrimination to colonialism in the same way as Scego does, both in *Roma negata* and elsewhere. To counter-act this, and in an attempt to restore agency to the performers in 'Exhibit B', Bailey paid special attention both to the nature of the gaze with which they would challenge the spectators (albeit with compassion, not anger),

43 John O'Mahony, 'Edinburgh's Most Controversial Show: Exhibit B, a Human Zoo', *The Guardian* (11 August 2014).

44 O'Mahony, 'Edinburgh's Most Controversial Show'.

and indeed their interaction with the audience was deemed a crucial part of the conversation. As Mirzoeff states, this gaze must be mutually enacted, since 'the right to look is strongly interfaced with the right to be seen'.⁴⁵ Yet many critics and audiences were baffled, unable to see the difference between a subversive re-presentation and a mere re-enactment. What couldn't these spectators see? Or what could they not look at? Was the risk of submitting themselves to the creative gaze of the other, and entering into a collective dynamic that identifies the other as a key constituent part (in which 'you, or your group, allow another to find you, and, in so doing, you find both the other and yourself'⁴⁶), too much for some to accept?

It is easy to see how this kind of recreation of traumatic tableaux might risk another objectification of, rather than mediated challenge to, the staged material itself, and yet Bailey's stated objective was precisely to start a potentially productive conversation which links past and present. As one critic said, 'the worth of Bailey's work is evident in the dialogue it has provoked [...] It has made so many people think so much, and to discontinue it is to disallow thought'.⁴⁷ This is a dialogue that surely takes us back to notions of the importance of communication and agency in the public sphere, but also in relation to newer networks of social media communication and digital or multimedia artistic production. It is these same practices that will allow for a sustained and multi-voiced debate around the afterlife of European imperialist practices in Africa, the kind that public such as Maaza Mengiste, Nadifa Mohamed and Igiaba Scego are enacting today through their engagement with, and descriptions of, colonial imagery in their writing. And it is my contention that without this multimedia dialogue that fuses past and present, we will not succeed in achieving a balanced response to contemporary challenges of migration, multiculturalism and racism in our societies.

45 Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 4.

46 Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.

47 Rich Juzwiak, 'Outrageous Art Exhibit of Caged Black People Shut Down by the Outraged', *Gawker* <<http://gawker.com/outrageous-art-exhibit-of-caged-black-people-shut-down-1638645653>> (accessed 17 February 2017).

Their acts of expression within the public sphere represent the kind of action which in Arendtian terms creates not only the conditions for 'remembrance, that is, for history',⁴⁸ but also holds the potential for the creation of a new society, 'the beginning of something new on our own initiative'.⁴⁹ And it is precisely the interface between text and image in Nadifa Mohamed, Maaza Mengiste and Igiaba Scego's work that further succeeds in creating a form of 'disruptive countervisuality'. As bell hooks writes:

Photography has been, and is, central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and renew life-affirming bonds. Using these images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye.⁵⁰

To conclude, I want to return to hooks' emphasis on the importance of mutual looking, and of creative play,⁵¹ and establish where and how these dynamics can also be located in the artistic production of the wider African diaspora, as well as in new directions in African photographic art. One evocative example is to be found in the work of Omar Victor Diop, a Senegalese photographer, whose latest work, 'Project Diaspora', has been described as 'a series of elaborately staged portraits of himself in various historical guises'.⁵² The photos are based on actual paintings from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, but also reference the contemporary world. As Diop himself states:

- 48 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 9.
 49 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.
 50 hooks, 'In Our Glory', 64.
 51 bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 29.
 52 Sean O'Hagan, 'Omar Victor Diop: "I Want to Reinvent the Heritage of African Studio Photography"', *The Guardian* (11 July 2015).

It started with me wanting to look at these historical black figures who did not fulfill the usual expectations of the African diaspora insofar as they were educated, stylish and confident, even if some of them were owned by white people and treated as the exotic other. [...] I wanted to bring these rich historical characters into the current conversation about the African diaspora and contemporary issues around immigration, integration and acceptance.⁵³

But these same questions are also being raised by Nomusa Makhubu, a South African artist, who literally re-inserts herself into a lost history which is only visible through colonial and imperial era imagery.⁵⁴ She does this by projecting images of her own body onto the older images (and vice versa), thus creating a powerful sense of reconnection. Similarly, the African Digital Art Network assembles a collection of diverse work that features collage and other digitally altered pieces, also by artists from the Horn of Africa.⁵⁵

But most illuminating to the present discussion are the collaged photographic works of Maud Sulter, a Scottish-Ghanaian artist, whose 1993 collection SYRCAS was recently on show at the Autograph Association of Black Photographers in London, and later as part of a wider retrospective at the Impressions Gallery in Bradford. As the curator of the London exhibition, Mark Sealy, has noted, the 'visual radicality' of Sulter's work results in a 'folding of space and a bending in the history of race', allowing her to speak for those hitherto rendered silent in time.⁵⁶ Highlighting her awareness of photography's 'tainted past' (since, as she herself says, 'its birth pangs ran concurrent with the abolition of slavery and many of the uses to which it was first put was that of categorizing "the other"'⁵⁷), the artist commits to using the medium as 'weapon', rather than 'tool', cutting

- 53 O'Hagan, 'Omar Victor Diop'.
 54 See African Digital Art, 'Africa Remix: the Artists Subverting Colonial Imagery', *The Guardian* (11 February 2015).
 55 See <<https://www.facebook.com/africandigitalart/>> (accessed 22 September 2017).
 56 Mark Sealy, 'On the NonConformist', in *Maud Sulter: SYRCAS* (London: Autograph ABP, 2016).
 57 Maud Sulter, 'The Nature of Photography: Black Notes from the Underground', *Feminist Arts News*, 3.2 (1989), 12–14.

and juxtaposing diverse images (and sometimes sections of text) in a powerfully unsettling way.

In photomontage, images are cut out of books or journals, ripped from one frame and forcibly reset into another. The scissors and knife cut and separate, excise and remove; images cannot be returned; books and magazines are forever despoiled.⁵⁸

The montages she produced during her career thus 'operate to banish history as an orthodoxy',⁵⁹ allowing the past to persist into and be alive in the present. Sulter's practice also thrives on the desire to perform 're-memory work' (drawing on Toni Morrison's use of the term, in which imagination is bound up with memory, and uncanny residues in the form of forgotten memories are brought suddenly to life in a process of *re-collection*⁶⁰). Sulter thus emphasizes the *political* dimension of photomontage, playing with frames of proximity and distance: something that recalls bell hooks' words at the start of this chapter about the importance of re-appropriating actions of rending, tearing and ripping. Just as in Sulter's art there is violence in both extraction and assembly of images, so her work points the way to conjuring 'spectral revenants who demand attention':⁶¹ previously lost or unnoticed Black figures from the histories of transatlantic slavery and colonial oppression, now actively re-inserted into European, colonial cultural frameworks. In this way photomontages such as SYRCAS create something new, something which fuses composite elements without ever concealing the seams of their re-montage and the dis-jointed nature of their assembly. These, for me, are works, just like the photographic intertexts of Nadifa Mohamed, Igiaba Scego and Maaza Mengiste, that succeed in recuperating past imagery in order to change the present and – crucially – to imagine new futures. As Maaza Mengiste has recently written: 'No story is

58 Deborah Cherry, 'The Ghost Begins By Coming Back: Revenants and Returns in Maud Sulter's Photomontages', in *Maud Sulter: SYRCAS* (London: Autograph ABP, 2016).

59 Sealy, 'On the NonConformist'.

60 See Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2007).

61 Cherry, 'The Ghost Begins By Coming Back'.

ever simple. Every photograph extends beyond the frame. Each eye shapes what it sees, and history bends to fit our needs'.⁶²

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62 Maaza, 'Bending History', 185.

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Index

- Addis Ababa 4-6, 9, 11, 30, 109-119,
121-125, 127, 129-130, 133 n, 142,
151, 154, 157, 160, 256
- Adwa 3, 4, 33, 132, 141, 143-149, 165, 173,
219-220, 225, 230
- AFIS (Amministrazione Fiduciaria Itali-
ana della Somalia) 14, 30, 32, 169,
172-174, 176-177, 181, 183, 186,
193-196, 198-204, 206-212
- Ali Farah, Cristina 207
- Amhara 5, 10
- Amharic 31, 102, 141-142, 145, 147-149,
160-164
- amnesia 146, 218, 226, 232, 235, 236, 253,
256
- Antar Mohamed 195, 207, 209, 229
- architecture 10, 11, 110, 115, 117, 119, 123,
127-128, 132, 285
- ascari* 252, 273, 302, 304, 306
- Asmara 5, 11, 61, 109, 110, 205, 246, 252,
266, 271, 275
- assimilation 48, 59, 61-64, 68, 147,
170-173, 181, 184, 187
- Badoglio, Pietro 22, 111, 270
- Barilli, Bruno 78, 84
- Becker, Lutz 232
- Balotelli, Mario 271
- Berlusconi, Silvio 22, 231, 273
- bodies 9, 11, 57, 81-82, 163, 206, 209, 274,
298, 304-307, 313
- borders 15-16, 23, 27, 28, 32, 77, 86,
100-103, 141, 147, 163-164, 188,
201, 241-243, 248, 254, 256-258,
260, 287
- Ethiopian-Somali border 93-94, 305
- Brizzi, Enrico 271, 290
- camps 20, 24, 83, 201, 243, 257-258, 304
- Canada 227-228, 246, 249-250, 255, 276
- Catozzella, Giuseppe 34, 268, 279-282,
284-288.
- citizenship 12, 51, 62, 64, 168, 172,
182-183, 188-189, 248, 260, 266,
269, 272-273
- class 99-100, 105, 111, 119-120, 124,
126-127, 130, 141, 147, 168, 187,
197, 256-257, 266, 268, 279
- colonialism 1, 2, 6-8, 22, 28, 32-33, 35,
47-48, 59, 63-64, 80, 82, 145,
162-164, 188, 202, 209, 212,
241-242, 249, 258-260, 266,
301-302, 310
- Italian colonialism 1, 2n, 6, 9-10,
13-14, 16, 29-30, 41, 50-51,
53-54, 60, 88, 115, 117, 124, 129,
167-169, 172-174, 187, 193,
198, 201, 205-207, 211, 218-219,
235-236, 243, 253, 319
- Costantini, Edoardo 81, 85, 90
- Crispi, Francesco 1, 38, 56
- cycling 266-267
- Cyrenaica 231-232, 270
- decolonization 13-15, 32, 35, 193, 198, 212,
223, 245n, 246, 247, 253, 312
- De Vecchi, Cesare Maria 73, 106
- diaspora 33, 35, 241, 242, 250, 297,
299-300, 312-313

- discrimination 31, 34, 35, 169, 178, 182, 186, 187, 195, 203, 268, 271, 274, 276, 282, 310
- Djibouti 1, 26, 154, 281
- Egypt 8, 24, 26, 98, 197
- empire 6, 75, 116, 128, 204, 206
- Italian Empire 5, 13, 30, 88, 89, 95, 98, 112, 116, 172
- British Empire 63
- Ethiopian Empire 147
- French Empire 64
- Roman Empire 97
- Solomonic Empire 141
- Eritrea 1-3, 5, 10, 13-15, 21, 24-26, 33-35, 54, 56, 58, 62-64, 88, 95, 102, 110, 113, 122, 124-125, 172, 174, 178-179, 196, 247, 251, 253, 255, 260, 266-267, 270-271, 274, 302, 305
- Emanuelli, Enrico 32, 194, 202-205, 212
- Ethiopia 1-5, 12-14, 26, 30-31, 34, 48, 93-95, 100-104, 109-110, 115-118, 129-134, 141-146, 148, 150, 152-155, 158, 163, 196, 201, 219-220, 232, 237, 243, 246, 257-258, 270-271, 275, 308
- Faarax Cawl 223-224, 238
- fascism 48, 53, 145, 146, 173, 193, 266, 271, 273, 277, 288
- First World War 149
- football 34, 268-275
- France 2, 5, 8, 16, 62-63, 119, 156, 201, 244, 253
- Garane Garane 270
- Gərmaččaw Tāklā-Hawaryat 142, 153-154
- Ghebremariam Ghebru 266-267
- gender 168, 187, 209-210, 217, 241, 266
- Germany 8, 13, 16, 47, 54, 247, 249, 274-275, 289
- Graziani, Rodolfo 4, 22, 151, 234
- Harar 5, 10, 160
- Haylā Səlasse 129, 142-145, 148-149, 151, 154, 156-158, 160, 162, 246
- Hawo Tako 104
- heroes 33, 35, 89, 154, 156-157, 205, 217, 220, 224, 230, 236, 286-287
- Ibrahim al-Koni 233-234, 236-237, 239
- imperialism 48, 51, 67, 74, 86, 93, 104, 105, 193, 231, 267, 277, 289
- Italy 1-5, 7-9, 11-19, 21-26, 28-35, 47, 49-50, 54-56, 60, 62, 64-65, 67, 80-82, 84, 87-89, 95, 97-99, 101-103, 110, 114-120, 123, 126, 128, 131, 133, 145, 149, 154-55, 168-175, 178, 181-189, 195-209, 211-212, 217-218, 229, 231-233, 235-236, 238, 241-242, 244-264, 266, 268-272, 274, 276, 278-281, 283, 287-288, 297, 300-303, 306-308, 310
- italianization 127, 180
- Kaha Mohamed Aden 207, 229
- Kirby, Ken 232, 240
- Kleist, Reinhard 34, 268, 279, 283-284, 288, 292
- Lampedusa 17, 19n, 21, 25, 34, 39, 257-258, 268, 275
- landscape 13-14, 29-30, 35, 73-89, 111-113, 127, 133, 135, 244
- Laurence, Margaret 222n, 224, 226-228, 236-237
- laws 12, 15-17, 19, 21, 23-25, 27-29, 33, 35, 49-68, 95, 101, 122n, 143,

- 171-172, 179, 183, 201, 208-210, 266, 269-271, 274, 278n, 308
- legacy 2, 13-14, 30-31, 35, 97, 99, 104, 109-110, 114, 128, 129, 150, 152, 158, 168-169, 207-209, 212, 218, 224, 226, 228, 231-232, 235-236, 241-243, 253, 259, 266, 271-272, 278, 288, 301
- Lybia 21-24, 26, 33, 48, 95, 196, 219-220, 230-233, 235-237, 244, 270, 300n
- memory 30-31, 33-35, 109, 130-133, 135, 143, 170, 199, 217-218, 220, 223, 226, 228-231, 235-236, 253-254, 268, 278, 301, 312
- selective memory 30, 133-134, 242, 256, 259, 288
- meticciano* 11, 271
- metropole 8, 9, 29, 56, 194, 243, 245, 246, 253, 259, 265
- migration 15-17, 19-21, 25-28, 33, 34-36, 182, 184, 241-246, 250, 252, 255, 257, 259, 268, 272, 274, 278, 300, 311
- Maaza Mengiste 295, 297-298, 300, 305, 309, 311-312, 314
- Malvezzi, Aldrobrandino 47-48, 50, 53, 56, 59, 61, 63, 70
- Massawa 3, 66, 255
- Mäkonñan Əndalkačaw 142, 146, 160, 165
- Mängastu Lamma 143, 153, 160, 162, 166
- miscegenation 112, 171, 206
- Mogadishu 5, 11, 31, 33, 81-82, 93-96, 98, 104-105, 109, 176-178, 181, 195, 202-205, 209, 211, 226, 229, 279, 285, 303
- Mohammed Abdulle Hassan 33, 217, 219-223, 225, 227, 230, 236-237
- Mohamed Siyad Barre 25, 103-105, 223-225
- Moreno, Martino Mario 174-175, 177
- Moser, Giorgio 32, 194, 202, 204-205, 212, 214
- Muammar Gaddafi 22, 24, 231-234, 237
- museum 22, 30, 93, 97
- Garesa 94-96, 98-100, 103-105
- Mussolini, Benito 4, 94, 118, 127, 155, 199, 308
- Mustafa Akkad 33, 232, 236
- Nadifa Mohamed 35, 295, 297, 300, 302, 304, 306-308, 311-312, 314, 316
- nationalism 6, 30-5, 55, 104, 141-164, 188, 228, 236, 268
- Nediani, Antonio 32, 194, 200, 212, 214
- Nuruddin Farah 33, 224-226, 228-229, 236-237
- Omar al-Mukhtar 33, 217, 219-220, 230-237
- Oromo 6, 10, 157, 164, 278
- race 11, 48, 50-52, 55, 60-62, 65-66, 68-69, 95, 114, 118, 167-169, 171-172, 177, 184, 188, 194-195, 208-209
- racism 31-32, 35, 67, 124, 161-162, 167-189, 195, 212, 255, 269, 272-274, 277, 289, 300, 310-311, 320
- Ravizza, Adalgiso 52, 65, 71
- refugees 16-18, 20-21, 23-25, 27-28, 242, 246-247, 251, 253-258, 260, 275-276, 278-279, 283, 288, 310, 319
- Resistenze in Cirenaica 235
- resistance 5, 12, 13, 22, 33, 85, 95, 104, 110-112, 115, 117-118, 131-132, 134, 143-146, 151, 155-156, 161, 219, 225, 227-229, 236-237, 276, 301, 303

- Robecchi Brichetti, Luigi 85, 87, 90
 Rome 9, 35, 60, 73, 94, 162, 209, 231–232,
 242, 246, 248, 250, 252, 267, 272,
 297, 306, 309
 Samia Yusuf Omar 34, 268, 283, 292
 Scego, Igiaba vii, 35, 207, 229, 240, 267,
 293, 295, 297, 300, 309, 311–312,
 314, 316
 Second World War 13, 15, 30, 104, 171,
 187, 195, 230, 271
 Sertoli Salis, Renzo 63, 68, 71
 Shirin Ramzanali Fazel 32–33, 42, 195,
 207, 209, 213
 Shewa 5, 10, 121–122, 158
 slavery 7, 57, 97, 151, 153, 158, 313–314
 Somalia 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 14, 25–26, 29–30,
 32–33, 73–74, 81–83, 86, 88,
 93–104, 168–176, 180–184,
 186–189, 193–203, 205, 207–209,
 211, 219–221, 223–226, 229,
 281–283, 285–286, 305, 321
 Stefanini, Giuseppe 82–83, 87–88, 90
 Sudan 21, 26, 34, 110, 119, 243, 247
 translation 226, 235n, 236, 280, 285, 301
 Tunisia 8, 24, 26
 UK *see* United Kingdom
 United Kingdom 33, 35, 244, 253, 280,
 297, 302
 United States 249, 289
 US *see* United States
 Vecchi, Bernardo Valentino 78, 91
 Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannēs 142,
 148, 166
 women 9–12, 62, 167, 174–175, 179, 181,
 185, 187, 241, 246
 representation of 32, 34, 82, 201–203,
 206–207, 209–210, 223, 280–282,
 285–288, 297, 300, 307–309
 Wu Ming 32, 195, 207, 209–211, 229, 232,
 235
 Zammarano, Vittorio Tedesco 29,
 78–80, 83, 86–87
 Zucca, Giuseppe 29, 82, 84–85

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